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The Palimpsest

Volume 65 | Number 2

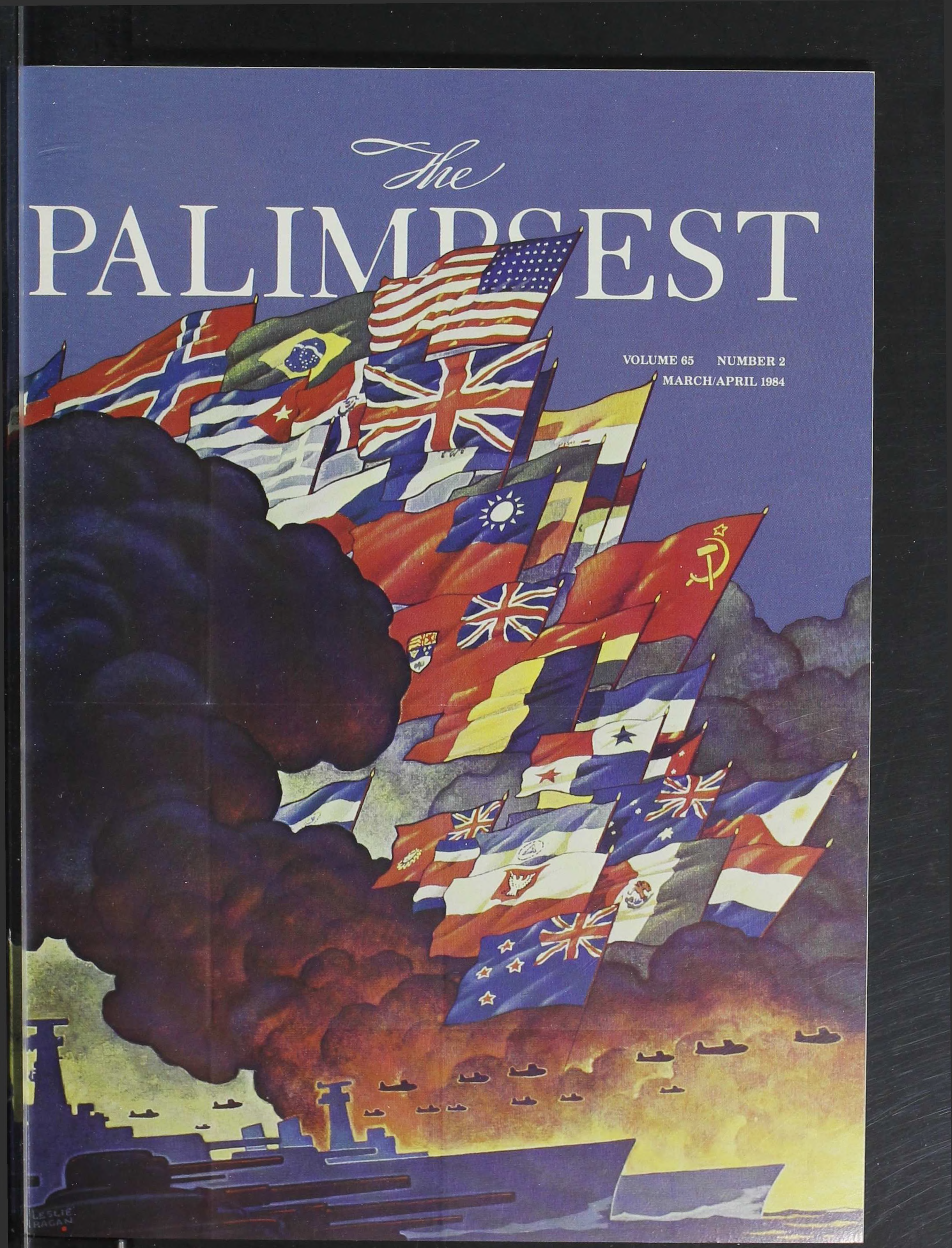
Article 5

3-1-1984

The Palimpsest, vol.65 no.2, March-April 1984

The PALIMPSEST

VOLUME 65 NUMBER 2
MARCH/APRIL 1984



Iowa State Historical Department
Office of the State Historical Society
The Palimpsest

PRICE — Free to members. Single issue — $1
MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual dues — $5
LIFE MEMBERSHIP — $150. HUSBAND AND WIFE JOINT LIFE MEMBERSHIP — $200.
ADDRESS INQUIRIES TO: State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Ia. 52240

USISSN 0031 — 0360

THE PALIMPSEST is published bimonthly by the Office of the State Historical Society in Iowa City. It is printed in Des Moines and distributed free to Society members and exchanges. This is the March/April 1984 issue and is Number 2 of Volume 65. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

The PALIMPSEST

Adrian D. Anderson, Executive Director

VOLUME 65 NUMBER 2 MARCH/APRIL 1984

Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

CONTENTS

Covers: *(Front) The Office of War Information's 1943 poster, "The United Nations Fight for Freedom," conveyed a strong sense of unity and purpose in the Allies' struggle against the Axis powers; while "He's Watching You," a 1942 Division of Information, Office for Emergency Management, poster offered an eerie reminder to Americans of the need to be ever watchful in time of war. (SHSI; cover photography by Robert A. Ryan/Dennett, Muessig, Ryan & Associates)*

The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

A Place of Peace in a World of War:
The Scattergood Refugee Hostel, 1939 to 1943

by Peter H. Curtis

The Scattergood property included a three-story school building, a gymnasium, a caretakers' home, farm buildings and twelve acres of land. (SHSI)

In January 1939, as much of the world waited anxiously for the outbreak of war, a group of Iowans met in West Branch "to find some tangible way by which [they] might further the cause of peace." They were members of the Society of Friends, and they were concerned with expressing the Peace Testimony for which Quakers are well known. The way these Iowa Quakers chose to express their beliefs was unusual. It resulted in the Scattergood Hostel for refugees from Hitler's Europe. During the next four years, about two hundred people of all ages from several European countries spent time at the hostel near West Branch. The story of the Scattergood Hostel is a remarkable chapter in Iowa's history, an intercultural, interreligious social experiment set in an isolated, rural environment.

The roots of this experiment lay in the tragic events taking place some four thousand miles from Iowa. By early 1939 some Americans were becoming aware of the desperate situation faced by a number of Europeans. Jews,

political democrats, socialists, and a variety of "non-Aryans" were finding Germany and Austria increasingly dangerous and hostile places in which to live. As Hitler relentlessly expanded his empire during the next few years, the number of these people rose proportionately. Just as they had done in previous wars, American Quakers responded to the international conflict and its victims with various forms of assistance. Friends' delegations visited Germany, financial and material aid was sent to the victims of oppression, and assistance was rendered in finding new homes for refugees. The American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], based in Philadelphia, was the primary agency through which Quakers carried on these activities.

It was to the American Friends Service Committee that the Iowa Quakers turned in their search for a way to tangibly express their religious beliefs. The AFSC was looking for places where refugees "could go for a few weeks or months to recover from the effects of their recent experiences, regain their confidence, improve their English, learn to drive a car, and if need be, start re-training themselves for some new line of work before seeking a permanent place in American society." Iowa Quakers owned such a place, and it was that fact that brought Homer Morris of the AFSC to West Branch to meet with more than sixty Friends on January 7 and 8, 1939.

The place in question was Scattergood School, a Quaker boarding school established in 1890, two-and-a-half miles southeast of West Branch. Always a small institution with a limited financial base, the school had been unable to continue operating in the face of the Great Depression and had closed its doors in 1931. Since then it had been used only occasionally for Quaker religious and social gatherings. As a possible site for a hostel, Scattergood School had many advantages. The buildings and facilities to support a residential center for forty to fifty people were already there. Land around the school could support crops and livestock which would provide part of the food for the hostel. And, most important, the rural, isolated site provided the kind of peace and quiet the AFSC believed refugees badly needed.

After full consideration of the AFSC's proposal, Iowa Quakers agreed to cosponsor a refugee hostel at Scattergood School. The Scattergood property was leased to the AFSC by Iowa Quakers for a dollar a year for the duration of the hostel's existence. Following the meetings of January 7 and 8, 1939, various committees were set up to raise funds, arrange for cleaning and fixing up the school buildings, and oversee the operation of the hostel itself. Friends from both the "Conservative" Quaker meetings and the "Progressive" Friends churches raised funds for the hostel, and the AFSC made several sizable loans to get the project off the ground. Painters, carpenters, and repairmen worked hard on the buildings in the late winter of 1939. Their work was assisted and overseen by West Branch area Friends. A new furnace was installed in the main building, and the plumbing and wiring were extensively repaired. Furnishings were purchased and installed, rooms were partitioned to change school dormitories to private quarters for families and individuals.

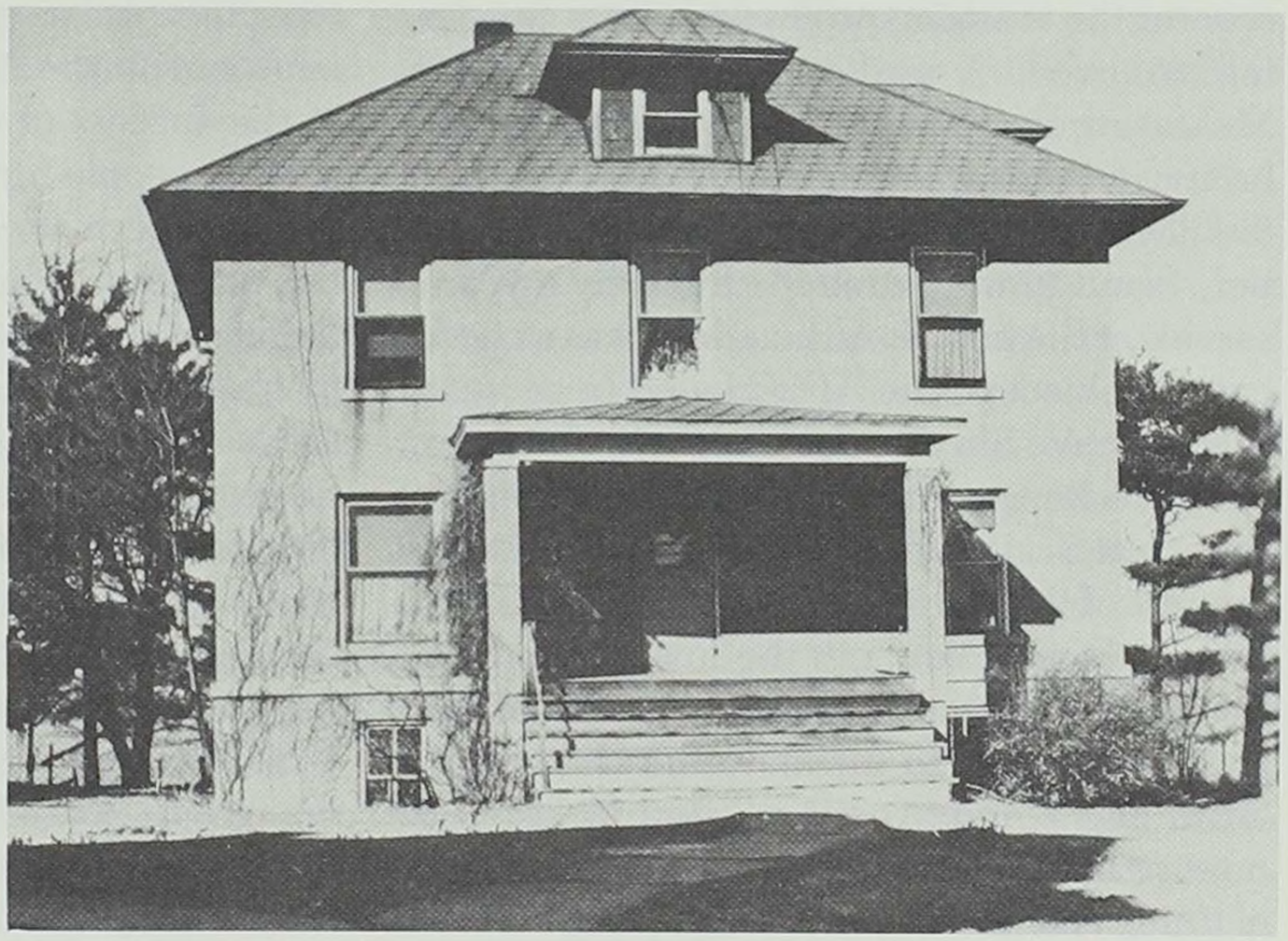
It was well that work progressed rapidly, for on April 6, 1939, a telegram from the AFSC in Philadelphia informed West Branch Friends that "six young men [were] to arrive [at] West Branch either the 14th or 15th. . . . Two of party Americans[,] four Germans." This was something of a shock to the Iowa Friends, who were still getting things in order at Scattergood. Sara M. Pemberton, secretary of the Scattergood executive committee and a moving force behind the hostel during its entire existence, wrote to the AFSC, "Where will you get the money for running expenses? food for the six young men? potatoes for garden plant-

ing?" Quakers have a saying that problems can be dealt with "as the way opens," and these practical difficulties were quickly overcome. Loans from the AFSC, fund raising by Iowa Friends' organizations and individuals, and hours of volunteer work by West Branch Friends, many of them farmers, got the hostel into operation.

What manner of people came to this rural Quaker hostel? The first four were in many ways typical of those to follow. One was a German, two were Austrians, and the fourth was a Czech. All came from urban backgrounds, and all were professional men. They included a college professor of geography, a statistician, a goldsmith (who was also a trained lawyer), and a businessman. All were at least middle class, but, given the severe restrictions on taking funds from German-controlled areas, all had arrived in the United States almost penniless. While willing to talk of many other matters, they tended to be closemouthed about their experiences with Nazi authorities. One was quoted in the *Des Moines Register* as having told a reporter, "I have nothing to say, but wait until my relatives are out of Germany and I'll tell you a lot." All spoke some English, some better than others. Only one of the original four was a Jew, although Kurt Schaefer, the statistician, noted that shortly after he began to openly criticize Nazi policies the German government abruptly claimed that one of his grandparents was Jewish. He had promptly lost his job and subsequently fled the country. Tales such as this would multiply as scores of other refugees arrived during the next four years.

If the Quakers of West Branch were barely ready for the refugees, the same can be said of the larger West Branch community. From the very earliest suggestion that foreigners might be coming to the area there had been rumblings of concern in the community. During the first days of the hostel, Sara Pemberton wrote to a friend, "[The refugees] seem to understand the situation and as far as we here know, have taken unfair criticism without too much resentment. Of course, it is hard for anyone to do his best work in such an atmosphere. When the first workmen came they worked up a friendly feeling among the people of the neighborhood toward the project. Of late, these same people are questioning what has happened." While the source of community resentment was not entirely clear, a number of factors doubtless entered into it. The strange languages and urban, European culture of the newcomers stood in dramatic contrast to their new neighbors' lifestyle. Many people in West Branch were themselves only a few generations removed from Scandinavian immigrants. They remembered their struggle to acquire land and jobs in Cedar County, and feared the competition that a wave of newcomers might bring. As it rapidly became clear that the Scattergood Hostel was merely a temporary residence for the refugees on their way to jobs elsewhere, the community resentment abated. Yet throughout its four years, the hostel remained somewhat isolated from the daily life of the West Branch community.

Although the refugees tended to live apart from the surrounding community, the whole state of Iowa was aware of and interested in developments at the hostel. While newspapers in the area gave only limited coverage to the plans to set up a hostel, the arrival of the first refugees touched off a barrage of statewide media coverage. Four carloads of reporters and photographers greeted the first arrivals, and the results were headline stories in all the major newspapers of the state. Part of this was due to the simple human interest quality of the story and part to the fact that it was Iowa's first direct human connection with the dramatic and world-shaking events taking place in Europe. Doubtless part of the local interest was also due to the fact that several prominent



First a men's dormitory for the Scattergood School, this building served as the caretakers' home until 1939, when it was remodeled for use as a dormitory for the hostel. (SHSI)

Iowans were directly involved in the project. From the very beginning J. J. Newlin of Des Moines, vice-president of Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn Company and a Quaker, was an active supporter of the project. He served as chairman of the Iowa Service Committee, the local arm of the American Friends Service Committee, and on the executive committee of the hostel itself. The *Des Moines Register* strongly endorsed the project with editorials and stories. Its editor, W. W. Waymack, was one of four individuals who later signed a fund raising letter which generated much financial support for the hostel.

The result of all the attention and publicity was that the small number of refugees often found themselves outnumbered by curiosity seekers during the first few months of the project. An article in the *Register* asked "curiosity seekers and visitors" to "temporarily refrain from coming to Scattergood." Staff members of the hostel reported that one afternoon more than fifty visitors had come to see the project, and explained that all the attention was interfering with getting the buildings in shape for the expected growth in the hostel's population. This interest abated very little. When an open house was held to celebrate six months' successful operation, over five hundred people from all over Iowa attended.

By October 1939 the hostel operation was in full swing. At the heart of the hostel were two people, Walter and Sara Stanley. This middle-aged Quaker couple had served as caretakers for the Scattergood property since the school had closed. They moved quietly and effectively into the hostel staff, Walter remaining in charge of the buildings and grounds and Sara working in the kitchen. They remained at the hostel through its entire existence, bringing continuity and a large measure of human compassion to the work. For years Sara Stanley continued to correspond with many former residents of the hostel. The remainder of the staff was largely young Quakers recruited by the AFSC. They were volunteers who worked for essentially subsistence wages. Not surprisingly, staff turnover was fairly high. Mr. and Mrs. Albert Martin, first directors of the hostel, stayed just two months. By profession a German language teacher, Albert Martin had served for two years with the AFSC in Berlin. He returned to this country planning to

reenter the teaching profession when an opening occurred. A post was offered to him at McMaster University in Canada shortly after he arrived at Scattergood, and he left to take it. Similarly, Robert Berquist, a young staff member, found himself drafted after only a year of service at the hostel. Although he was a conscientious objector, the AFSC failed to persuade the Selective Service System to agree to allow men like Berquist to perform their alternative service at Scattergood. Hence, Berquist spent the rest of the war in a series of Civilian Public Service camps. Yet both the Iowa Friends and the AFSC saw this staff turnover as positive. It was clearly hard to maintain the level of idealism and commitment needed for such an intense human experiment over a long period of time. The presence of new, young, and idealistic staff members gave the hostel a steady infusion of enthusiasm to match the flow of new refugees.

The refugees came to the hostel — and left — in a small but steady trickle. By October 1939, for example, the old school buildings had housed thirty-five Europeans, of whom only eighteen were still in residence. From the very beginning all those in the hostel project had seen the placement of its "guests" in permanent jobs in the American economy as crucial to the success of the experiment. One of the earliest people hired for the staff — and one of the most permanent — was Giles Zimmerman, the placement director. Although he lived at the hostel, he traveled a great deal turning up jobs for the refugees. Behind every placement there was a fascinating human story. Kurt Rosegg, the goldsmith and lawyer from the original group of four, found a position in the repair division of the Mastercraftsmen Jewelry Company in Des Moines. Another of the original four was placed as an office worker at Antioch College in Ohio. A third member of the first group, Kurt Schaefer, became a professor in the College of Commerce at the University of Iowa. Successful placement often depended on the willingness of the refugee to adjust to the realities of the American workplace. A brochure given to new arrivals at the hostel explained, "Your past experience and training will be very valuable to you, but it is not enough. You must be willing to use that training, adjusting it when necessary, to secure a position here. Your social position in America does not depend solely on your job. If a person

Walter and Sara Stanley became caretakers of the Scattergood property in 1931 when the school closed, and supervised the refurbishing of the property for the European refugees in 1939. They stayed on as caretakers through the life of the hostel, 1939 to 1943, Walter supervising the buildings and the farming of the surrounding land and Sara working in the hostel kitchen. (courtesy Robert Berquist)

does any job well, cheerfully and carefully, he is respected regardless of the nature of the position."

Life at the Scattergood Hostel consisted largely of a varying blend of learning and labor. Everyone — staff and refugees — shared the extensive manual labor required to keep the place going. Men were usually assigned the jobs requiring the most strength, such as drainage ditch digging or lawn care. Women shared cooking duties under the direction of a staff dietician. Both sexes did cleaning and washing work, a situation that did not always sit well with European men raised in a culture which rigidly defined such tasks as "women's work." A newcomer to the hostel commented, "An overwhelming impression was to see men doing jobs which in Europe were considered far beneath their dignity such as dishwashing, scrubbing floors, laundering, etc. Some of them worked with real skill and pleasure." Compounding these cultural difficulties were the effects of the traumatic experiences the refugees had been through, often including long periods of enforced inactivity in detention camps. Finally, most of the refugees were from middle- or upper-class backgrounds in which much household labor was partly or completely performed by machines or servants. Despite all these problems, however, most refugees adapted quickly to the heavy labor required to run the hostel. They realized, in the words of one of them, "we have to find a way to adapt ourselves to our new life. It is a vital condition of our living in a new country."

One requirement of living in a new country that all agreed to at once was the need to learn a new language, history, and literature. From the very beginning staff members taught classes in all these subjects. Coupled with them was an effort — often frustrated — to ensure that English was the predominant language used at the hostel. The minutes of one staff business meeting after another were filled with exhortations to try to impress on the residents the importance of using the language of their adopted land in their daily conversation. That they were not doing so was clearly a matter of habit, not intention. The English language was taught primarily through individual tutorials, and such instruction was considered to be the most important at the hostel.

The refugees themselves had a role in setting their own curriculum. Writing in the hostel's *Monthly News Bulletin*, one of them commented, "Upon request of most of our residents here, there has been introduced a poetry class and one for public speaking . . . [I]n the latter topics range from 'My Impressions of Abraham Lincoln' to 'The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Met.' This kind of half entertainment, half instructive work, is worthy of imitation for everybody and it is easy to digest in an evening, too." Certainly the hostel's efforts to teach a new language and culture to its residents were tremendously aided by the fact that most of them were already highly educated, intelligent, and strongly motivated persons. This is hardly surprising, for it took intelligence, perseverance, and strong nerves — and, often, luck — to get out of Hitler's Europe in this period. People who had accomplished that feat were not likely to allow a small matter like learning English to hold them back.

Another skill most hostel residents lacked was that of driving an automobile. Living in crowded European cities with good public transportation, most of the refugees had never had any need to learn to drive. The great distances, the abundance of roads, and the availability of cars in the United States required that they do so. To fill this need the hostel pressed into duty a succession of second-hand vehicles of varying ancestry and quality. Some of these became beloved and remembered Scattergood institutions, acquiring names ("Suzy") and reputations. The roads around the hostel, while little traveled and thus ideal for beginners, were hard on the vehicles. The refugees

A portion of each day was set aside for studying English, American history and geography, and American customs. The Scattergood guests were expected to remain at the hostel for at least four months, working and learning about American life, before going out to work for themselves in their new homeland. (courtesy Robert Berquist)

learned quickly about car repairs and changing tires on their outings. Even so, more than one trip ended in a long walk home when a car shot off a muddy or icy road, or a breakdown defied amateur tinkering.

Trips were a regular feature of hostel life. The organizers recognized from the outset that total isolation would be as undesirable for the refugees as total immersion in American life. There were frequent trips to Iowa City to purchase supplies and do other errands, and hostel residents went along on a rotating basis. This opened to the refugees the opportunity to attend the University of Iowa. As most of them were educated persons with a deep respect for learning, a number of them took courses at the university. Another favorite excursion was to the Amana colonies. The food, the language — indeed, the whole setting — was familiar, yet fascinating to the newcomers from Europe. "They speak low German, besides English," said one refugee, and the "local bakery looks like an old German 'Backstube', one hundred and fifty years ago." The same observer was impressed with the "community basis for work," and commented "a high recommendation for the government of United States that it was and still is possible to realize such an experiment as . . . the Amana Villages." Supplementing these group excursions were regular appearances by both hostel staff and residents before community groups all over eastern Iowa. They spoke about the hostel, world affairs, and related topics. As war engulfed the world during these years, there was never a shortage of requests to speak to

attentive audiences.

All of these activities took money as well as volunteer staff, and the hostel appeared to have always had a hand-to-mouth existence. Besides a steady trickle of small gifts from Iowa Friends' meetings, and banks and individuals, the organization received occasional support from other religious groups. The Brethren Service Committee, a relief group similar to the AFSC but sponsored by the Church of the Brethren, made a sizable contribution of funds and staff for about six months. Support was also received from Jewish groups and individuals, often funneled through the AFSC's national office. A surviving statement for January 1, 1940, shows donations to the hostel including an anonymous gift of $2.00 from a West Branch resident, $5.26 from a P.E.O. chapter in Des Moines, many donations from Friends' churches and meetings, and over $1700 from the AFSC. After paying all the 1939 bills, the treasurer found himself with a balance of $5.60 A year and a half later the situation was still the same. Sara Pemberton reported, "The budget situation is rather strained at this time. The American Christians are not contributing to refugee support." The result was a fund raising effort led by J. J. Newlin. A letter signed by Newlin, Martha Balderston, director of the hostel, W. W. Waymack of the *Des Moines Register*, and Dr. David Beach of a Minneapolis congregational church was sent to thousands of potential donors. The result was that by the end of 1942 the hostel was for the first time on a solid financial footing.

Yet it was at this very time that the need for the hostel was declining quite abruptly. Over the years, most of the hostel's residents had come to Scattergood via internment camps in the portion of France not directly occupied by the German army. The United States' entrance into the European war and the accompanying break in relations with Vichy France had slowed the inflow of refugees to this country during 1942. Economic changes, however, soon sounded the death knell of the hostel. By the end of 1942 the American economy was surging out of the Great Depression, fueled by massive government spending as our military geared up for the war effort. The result was the virtual ending of unemployment. Indeed, as young men went off to war, the economy was suddenly short of workers. In a letter to Martha Balderston, director of the hostel, Mary Rogers of the AFSC explained the result of this new situation. "With the shortage of man-power . . . Americans in the lower-paid jobs are receiving better paid appointments; refugees are able to step into these less well paid positions. The majority of them are now able to find work, and their need for money is so great that they are unable to think of one, two or three months of additional unemployment, even though this is a period of preparation." Mary Rogers pointed out that this situation was made worse by Scattergood's distance from the cities most of the refugees arrived in, but doubted that even if the hostel were close to New York City it could find enough residents to keep going much longer. She closed her letter by expressing the AFSC's great regret that the hostel's days as a refugee center were coming to an end, and appreciation for "all that has been accomplished for our refugee friends. Those of us who have known the members of the staff personally feel even more keenly our sense of gratitude and admiration for the spirit which has made the hostel so warm and living an influence in the lives of the refugees and in the community."

Indeed, it was this spirit, intangible and yet intense, which so distinguished the Scattergood Hostel. In part it was simply due to the unique role of the place. Part school, part hotel, part vocational training center, it was a small and unique community with a strong sense of its own mission. Emerging from the idealistic, young staff and the scores of emo-

Built by Scattergood guests, this wartime snowman sported a gas mask in addition to its more typical snowman facial features. (courtesy Robert Berquist)

tionally scarred yet indomitable European refugees was a sense of an extended, intercultural family. At bottom, it was the people of the hostel — staff and "guests" — and their love and commitment to each other that gave the place its unique spirit. Children were welcomed — the few that passed through the hostel — and cared for by all. Community pets — dogs and cats — were enjoyed, cared for, and warmly remembered in later years by former residents. Active groups of "graduates" of the hostel were formed and met socially for years afterward in Chicago and several other major cities. By any possible measure — the success in life of its former residents or the experience it gave to young Quakers expressing their religious testimonies — the hostel had surely succeeded in fulfilling the hopes of the Iowa Friends who created it. Writing to Martha Balderston, a former resident of the hostel aptly

summarized its role in the years between 1939 and 1943. It was, he wrote, a "place of peace in a world of war, a haven amidst a world of hatred."

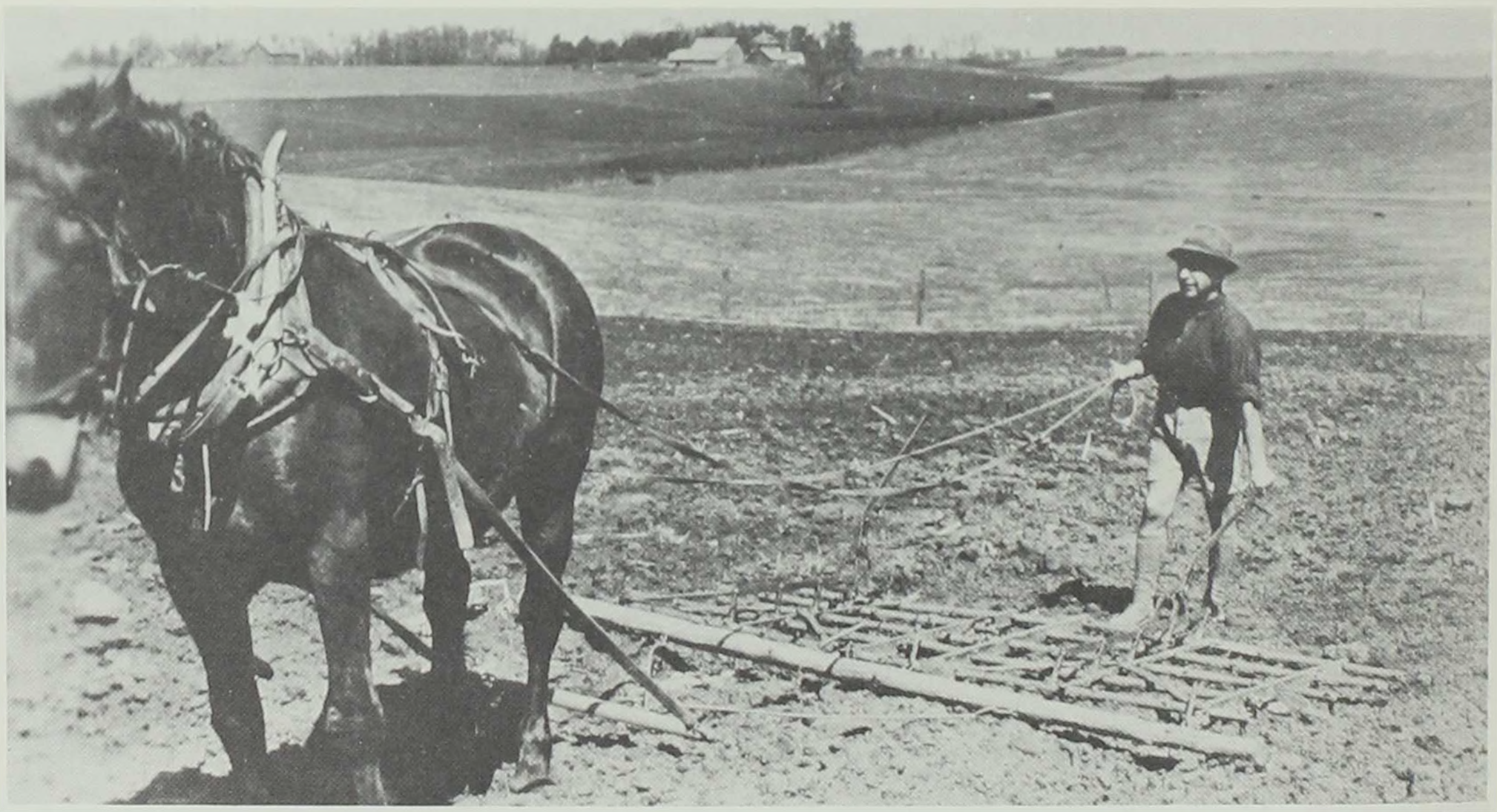
Yet by one of those quirks that keep history from being as neat as fiction, the story of the Scattergood Hostel has a much less happy postscript. Not surprisingly, those who had overseen the hostel's life and success looked around for another use for Scattergood's buildings and staff. In the same letter in which she told Martha Balderston of the ending of the flow of refugees, Mary Rogers of the AFSC suggested another possible use for Scattergood. It could "be used as a placement center for Americans of Japanese ancestry. There are many well qualified farmers in the relocations camps." The United States government, she reported, would "be happy to have us take a group of Japanese Americans into a hostel and arrange for the placement of them."

During World War II the United States government had "interned" thousands of American citizens of Japanese descent, fearing that they might aid their former homeland. This episode in American history was criticized by very few at the time; recently it has become recognized for what it was, an ugly example of racism — no German-Americans were "interned." Quakers had opposed the internment program, and it is not surprising that the War Relocation Authority turned to the AFSC when the government began to look for a way to funnel the Japanese-Americans back into the labor force. For its part, the AFSC turned naturally to Scattergood. Many of the Japanese-Americans had farming backgrounds, and Iowa farmers were seriously short of labor as the military draft expanded.

The executive committee of the hostel met several times to discuss the proposal, and all members believed that this would be a logical and positive way to continue Scattergood's usefulness. Others had their doubts. When a Scattergood staff member sounded out the local FBI agent on the idea, his response was that "there would be no opposition from the FBI," but he went on to comment "you people certainly like to tackle the hot spots." J.J. Newlin of the executive committee did observe, "There is some reason to believe that the neighborhood is a little opposed" to the idea. That turned out to be something of an understatement.

By February 8, 1943, the executive committee of the hostel had gone as far as determining that a Japanese-American hostel would open on March 1. By then, however, vociferous opposition was building within the wider West Branch community. While some local residents had privately feared and opposed the hostel for European refugees in its first months, the prospect of bringing in Japanese-Americans stirred open public opposition. From the perspective of forty years it is difficult to determine just how widespread and deep the opposition in West Branch and Cedar County was. Some observers maintained it was just a few bitterly opposed individuals led by the local commanders of American Legion posts. Others sensed a general, deeper, and wider reaction against the hostel's new role. Whatever the reality, the executive committee felt the pressure sufficiently to hold two public meetings in West Branch in February. In those public meetings several local residents spoke strongly against the plan, claiming that local men in the military service "would not stand for it." In the end, the second community meeting urged the executive committee to defer any commitment to house the Japanese-Americans. At about the same time the local American Legion commander telegraphed Senator Guy Gillette to protest the plan, saying "It does not fit our war psychology."

Faced with active opposition, and little open and aggressive support, the Scattergood executive committee and the War Relocation Authority quickly reassessed their decision.



By profession a stationer and by interest an amateur gardener, Fritz Treuer, of Austria, was surprised by the richness of Iowa's soil. (SHSI)

After the second community meeting a WRA leader concluded that "in view of the strong opposition that had developed . . . it would be unwise at the present time to push the matter further." An AFSC observer concluded, "It is only an evidence of the increasing war tension which we are sure to encounter as the war progresses." It was one thing to house European refugees from Hitler in Cedar County; housing Japanese-Americans was something else again. Their color and culture made them highly visible in a rural community. Friends began to fear that the Japanese-Americans' presence would give "an opportunity for the pent-up war hysteria against Quakers . . . because they do not buy bonds and contribute scrap, [it would give local superpatriots the opportunity] to blow off steam and vent their spleen . . ." The plan to open the hostel to Japanese-Americans was abandoned. By the end of 1943, however, a relocation center for them was in operation in the less visible and more heterogeneous environment of Des Moines.

The end of the Scattergood Hostel did not mean the end of the usefulness of the Scattergood property, however. As any traveler today on Interstate 80 knows, the site is still very much in use. Encouraged by the success of the hostel, by returning prosperity, and by the prospect of the coming of peace, the Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative) decided to return the property to its original mission. In the fall of 1944 the Scattergood School was reopened. It remains in operation today, a small but vibrant expression of the same Quaker testimonies and beliefs which gave rise to the Scattergood Hostel. □

Note on Sources

The records of the Scattergood Hostel, and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings accompanying them, provided the major source of information for this article. These records are now held in the manuscript collections of the Office of the State Historical Society, Iowa City. An interview with Floyd and Mary Helen Fawcett of West Branch helped to answer several important questions. The author especially wishes to thank Robert Berquist of West Branch for his advice, information, and encouragement. An annotated copy of this article has been deposited in the manuscript collections of the Office of the State Historical Society.

Memories of a POW

by Charles A. Slavens

as told to Thomas P. Slavens

In 1942 we left the United States and landed in Northern Ireland where we first heard rumors that we would participate in an invasion of North Africa. We spent approximately nine months in Northern Ireland before being shipped to Scotland for amphibious training.

After we left Scotland we were at sea for approximately six weeks before making the initial invasion of North Africa near Algiers. General Clark had done a fine job in preparing a safe landing for us, and we had little resistance at the point at which we entered Africa.

I was with the Medical Corps working on detached service in a hospital while we prepared a task force to attempt to cope with the forces of German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who was pushing from the south and east toward Tunis. Our task force consisted of approximately three thousand men. As part of Company C of the 109th Medical Battalion, we were involved in attempting to cut Rommel off from the African coast.

The largest gun that our troops had was a seventy-five millimeter, while the Germans had eighty-eights mounted on their Mark IV tanks. On February 14, 1943, in a valley called Faid Pass, Rommel's troops appeared over the brink of the mountains in the desert. This combat was probably the first our troops had seen, and they were startled to see the tanks coming over the crests instead of through the pass. Our troops began firing when the German tanks were well out of range; Rommel simply sat back.

Then Rommel pulled his tanks to a point where he was able to spot all of our artillery and to accurately assess our strength. With such an army poised against our task force, we had no chance. They knocked out all our artillery while keeping out of our range. Then the German infantry simply started moving with the German armor; they were so confident that their men rode on the sides of the tanks to where we were. They had the benefit of a great deal of air power and, in a few hours, they were able to beat our troops decisively. We were not equipped in any way to deal with such an onslaught.

Being an unarmed medic, I had dug a foxhole as had a friend. I told my friend that we should shout back and forth to each other to learn if either of us was in danger. His father was a funeral director in Altoona, Pennsylvania, and he had sent his son a cigarette case on which was an advertisement for his funeral home in Altoona and his telephone number. With all the firing going on, I was smoking a good deal and kept looking at that advertising for the funeral home. Finally, I threw the cigarette case away because I feared that I might be using such services before I wanted them.

Suddenly I called to my friend and he did not answer; I thought that I should go find out what

had happened to him. I started to crawl from my foxhole to go to see if I could help my friend. He had spotted some Germans and had not answered my call because he was afraid of being captured by them. When I came to his hole, I found myself looking into the barrel of an eighty-eight millimeter gun not more than twenty-five feet away. A German soldier came over to where I was and said in perfect English, "Hands up! For you the war is over." Then he proceeded to search me to make sure that I had no weapons even though I was wearing an armband with a red cross indicating that I was a medic. We did not even have side arms.

They started rounding up the American soldiers in the area; they numbered about three thousand. My company was captured intact because we were not armed and our commanding officer thought that we should not resist or try to escape lest there be many casualties. After our capture they marched us to a village where we slept in sheds and shanties. The next morning they started moving us towards Sfax. We walked all day without water or food. The first drink that I had was along a road where some water was standing in a ditch. The water was filled with worms and one had to brush them aside in order to get a drink. When in need of food or water, however, the animal instinct becomes more prominent and I was glad to get water even if it was wormy.

We marched all that day and at night we slept on the ground with only our clothes for bedding. Although the desert was hot during the day, it was extremely cold at night for anyone lying on the sand. We tried to dig holes in the ground to escape the desert wind. Groups of three or four men would lie next to each other to share body warmth. Although the arrangement was fairly warm, it was also quite uncomfortable.

The next morning we started walking again and marched until about three o'clock in the afternoon. We were frightened because we had heard of mass killing of prisoners. Then, suddenly, they lined us up four abreast in something resembling a gravel pit with our backs to a wall. The Germans set up two machine guns across the road from this embankment. We thought they were going to shoot us and bulldoze dirt over the tops of our bodies and bury us there. We had heard a good deal of propaganda before we were captured about what would happen to us if we were taken prisoner. In actuality, they gave us a can of sardines and a little chunk of bread apiece. It was our first food since being captured.

Then they marched us for several miles. Because we were the first Americans who had been captured, Rommel came along in a jeep to see us. He said nothing, but being in the area he wanted to see his first American prisoners.

Then they marched us until we came to a penned-in area in the desert where we slept. In the middle of the night, however, trucks came, picked us up, and took us to Sfax. During this time, we had received no food except for the sardines and bread. From Sfax they transported us in about four days to Tunis, where we received our first warm food. It consisted of something resembling black-eyed peas. We had no utensils. If one happened to have an empty can, the peas or beans were served in that. I had such a can and received my first warm food in that container. When I started to eat the vegetables, I looked into the can and saw that the peas or beans were wormy. They had not thoroughly boiled the peas or beans and the worms were still wiggling. We waited until dark to eat our first warm meal after being captured so that we might not see the worms.

At this time, they began separating us. I was taken by air from Tunis to southern Italy, where, with about one hundred fifty other men, I stayed for approximately six months. At this point, the Geneva convention did not seem to apply to us. We were furnished no Red Cross parcels; we lived on German

rations, and we were subjected to forced labor. A great deal of ammunition had been hauled to this area by rail by the Germans, and in the mountainous terrain it was unloaded and stored.

In violation of the Geneva convention, they forced us to load any ammunition which was then flown or shipped to Africa from southern Italy for use against our fellow Americans. Knowing that this was not permitted by the Geneva convention we decided to strike.

They usually would force us to go out at four o'clock in the morning and we would load ammunition all day. They would then bring us back before dark for our one meal of the day. When we told them that we were not going to load any more ammunition, they laughed and said, "That's fine. We'll cut off your water and food until you decide to load the trucks."

We stayed out until nearly four o'clock in the morning. After one has been without food or water for twenty-four hours, however, one tends to become cooperative. We, therefore, loaded their trucks and they took us in and gave us a small can of soup and a small slice of bread. Such were our rations in those days. Occasionally we would get what was called 'butter', which was said to be a coal or petroleum product.

Once I was loading ammunition in piles about the size of a two-car garage when the Americans or the British strafed the valley. During the strafing I was concerned that they were going to hit the ammunition and cause a chain reaction which would have blown up the whole valley. I thought that if I were going to die I would just as soon go in great fashion. I lay down by the largest pile of ammunition and thought that that was the way to go! Fortunately, they did not set off a single pile of ammunition.

At that camp there were twenty-eight men for each five-man tent. We slept in our clothes and we soon became extremely lousy. It did not do any good to take a bath or try to delouse because of the crowded conditions. With so many men in a tent of that size, one got rid of the lice one day only to get them back in bed that night from the other men. We became inured to lice during the six months that we were in that camp. There was much dysentery but there were few attempts to escape. A few fellows tried to break out but they really had nowhere to go.

When the Americans hit Sicily, the Germans had no knowledge of where they would land. They knew that an attempt to invade the mainland would soon be made. Thus they roused us in the middle of one night and after marching us for the remainder of that night, they loaded us onto an old boxcar which then started to pull out of the station. We were almost immediately attacked by American planes. The pilots had no way of knowing we were on the train. The concussion from the bombs blew the doors off the car. Hearing more bombs coming, I surmised that they were going to hit in my vicinity and I dove between the railroad track and the platform and got my head down for protection. When the dust cleared, I placed my one hand on the body of a German guard who only moments before had been standing upright on the platform but whose throat had been cut by a piece of shrapnel. I put my other hand on an American soldier who had had his leg blown off with shrapnel. I put a tourniquet on his leg and gave him a shot of morphine which I had acquired. I also gave him a cigarette and then I ran to higher ground. On the way, I encountered an Italian merchant whose little store had been demolished. Knowing that I was an American, he shot his finger in the air and shouted, "Roosevelt, Roosevelt, the great liberator!"

After the bombing attack they rounded us up and brought us back to the train. About half of the train had been destroyed. They, therefore, put eighty men in a car in which there had only been forty previously. It was so crowded no

one could sit down, and there were no toilet facilities. No water was available until we arrived at a small camp near Naples, where we got some Red Cross parcels. Prior to that, we had received only one Red Cross parcel.

We were shipped on to northern Italy, and from there they shipped us to Stalag IIB near Hammerstein, Germany. This camp was the first prisoner of war camp in which I was incarcerated. There we started receiving Red Cross parcels regularly. This camp had no American doctors, although I had had some schooling at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, as a surgical technician. It contained approximately five thousand prisoners of war who slept on straw in bunk beds. There were no sheets and we had only our clothes to cover our backs. Some of our fellow prisoners had unfortunately traded their shoes and other items of clothing to the Italians for such trivial items as figs when they were in southern Italy where it was warm. American money was also of little value. I had seen men pay as much as $150 for a handful of figs.

I was put in charge of the medical barracks in the camp. We normally had about three hundred men who were incapable of being sent on work jobs which meant we ran a sick call of about three hundred a day in the camp. I had seven men working under my supervision. With the little knowledge I had, I sorted out the most serious cases who were then seen by a German doctor. I would take them from our compound to the first aid station, where there was a German doctor who spoke perfect English. He would tell me how to treat the sick ones. If they were quite sick, the camp had a hospital to which they could be sent. Although my job was a seven-day-a-week experience, the work I did there helped me to cope emotionally with prison life. Also, I received better treatment from the German doctor and from the prisoners than did some of the men incarcerated.

Not all experiences were pleasant, however. One day a German officer entered the sick barracks with its three hundred men suffering from such maladies as malaria and gunshot wounds. It was my responsibility to call the men to the attention when an officer entered, but I did not believe that it was necessary to call men who were in bed to attention. When I did not call them to attention, the German officer asked who was in charge. Then he asked me why I had not called them to attention. My German was slight and I replied, "Nichts verstehen," or "I do not understand." At that, he drew his pistol and I heard it click. I knew that he was ready to shoot, and he continued in German, saying "I'll make you understand." I called the sick men to attention!

In December 1944 there was a rumor to the effect that some of our men would be permitted to go back to the United States on a prisoner exchange. The German doctor with whom I was working told me that he was going to get my name on the list. By this time we had an American doctor in camp. He believed that because of the work I was doing with him, which was similar to what I had previously done with the German doctor, I should be taken off the list for possible repatriation. The American doctor believed that I could do more good by staying in Germany. I believed, however, that if there was any chance that I could get out of the prisoner of war camp and go home I wanted to avail myself of that opportunity.

In the camp near Hammerstein, many Russian prisoners and civilians were reported to have died of typhus. An officer at the camp once described to me how thousands of Russians had died from typhus, which was spread by lice and was recognizable because of the listlessness of its sufferers. In the final stages of the disease, those people who died from it deteriorated to the point that they could not move about. The officer said that they had other Russians load the bodies like cordwood

onto hayracks and drive the vehicles to a dumping spot which they used as a burial ground. He said the German guards would occasionally see what was supposed to be a corpse squirm and would reach down to stab that person to put him out of his misery. We also heard that the shower room in which we were occasionally allowed to bathe had been used to kill some of the inmates and political prisoners. They were told that they were going to get a shower and then gassed.

Some other experiences were amusing, however. I had a delightful time once with a Belgian prisoner. We were separated from the other nationalities according to the rules of the Geneva convention, which were partially adhered to in the prisoner of war camps. The Belgian fellow was an interpreter between the Germans and the Americans; this job allowed him to go into the town of Hammerstein, where the basic medium of exchange had become cigarettes. These coffin nails were used to buy such things as radio parts or various items of food from the guards and from the other prisoners who went outside the camp. The Belgian knew that my glasses had been taken from me when I was captured for the gold in the frames. They had also taken our watches and rings. He arranged for a doctor's appointment for me in Hammerstein, knowing that the physician would not be there at that time. We were accompanied to town by a German guard. When we arrived and the physician was not there, the guard wanted to take us back to the camp. The interpreter, however, suggested that the German might not want to go back and walk guard for the remainder of the day. He asked why we did not take the day off with the understanding that the guard could do what he wanted and that we would meet him at the station that evening and take the train back to the camp together. After accepting some cigarettes, the guard allowed us to leave for a pleasant day. The Belgian interpreter had connections in Hammerstein. We went to a hotel where he bribed a German who wanted to know where I came from. I said "Iowa," but he did not know where that was. I told him that Iowa was near Chicago, and he decided that I must be a gangster.

We traded some coffee for a couple of bottles of wine and went to a pub that was run by two German frauleins and spent the remainder of the day there. Several German soldiers were in the pub. I was dressed in an English uniform, but many people in the tavern had on English uniforms. Even some of the Germans wore them and thus I was not too conspicuous. The Belgian was also wearing an English uniform which, incidentally, was much warmer than an American uniform. The Germans could not figure out, however, how we got wine when they could not get it and therefore had to drink beer. We spent the major part of the day there. We had brought some canned meat and some butter or margarine as well as coffee and cigarettes for the girls who ran the bar and they agreed to fix us a meal. We had dinner with them. This was my only "free" day while I was a prisoner. We then went back to the station and met the guard as we had agreed and took the train back. Nothing was ever said about the glasses!

After the American doctor took over in the camp, I continued to believe what the German doctor had told me about my name being on a list for repatriation or exchange. The American doctor did not want me to go home and said that the Germans were probably lying to me. He also said that if I left it would be difficult to know exactly where they would be taking me. Finally the day came when they called out the names of approximately three hundred of us who were to be exchanged. These men included the seriously wounded in addition to some of us who were medics and who, according to the Geneva convention, should not have been taken prisoner at all.

They took us from Stalag IIB near Hammerstein to Fürstenwalde near the Oder River. We stayed as prisoners there, and I relinquished my job as a medic in anticipation of coming home. While in the camp there we were next to the Russian and the Italian compounds but segregated from them.

The Americans were kept in the compound whereas the Italians were allowed to leave for work. They were taken out each morning and brought back in the evening. While they were out, they were in a position to buy eggs, potatoes, and chickens, and smuggle them back into the camp. The only way we could get to them was to cut holes in the wire fence separating us and then enter their compound to make exchanges for their produce. I did this a few times and was caught once. A German guard was going to put me in solitary but on the way to confinement a friend (who spoke German fluently) and I talked to him and offered him cigarettes for leniency. He agreed to return us to our compound if we promised that we would not attempt to escape again. Such promises did not mean much!

In this camp I had the opportunity to help one of our soldiers who had been shot during the invasion of Normandy. As a result of a gunshot wound in the head, he had had an eye destroyed. One of the medics knew that I had performed medical services in Hammerstein and informed the Russian doctor who was to perform surgery on the hapless young man of the fact. The Russian asked if I would prepare the fellow for an operation. My experience in civilian life as a barber was somewhat helpful in this regard. I was able to shave him and clean the wound in preparation for surgery. I learned through my wartime experiences that the German and Russian doctors were good at practicing their discipline in field situations because they seldom if ever performed under the sterile conditions which American doctors expected. The operation was a success and the boy recovered.

It was approximately three months before I was notified that I would be among the able-bodied who would be exchanged. In the meantime, I had come to think that perhaps the American doctor had been right. To this day I do not know how they selected the seventy-five of us who were repatriated, because there were more medics than that in this group. Neither do I know the conditions which formed the basis for the exchange. Yet, seventy-five able-bodied Americans were put on a train one day in February 1945 for exchange. By this time American forces had progressed to a point not too far from Frankfurt-am-Main.

They took us by rail coach from Fürstenwalde and virtually hitchhiked us across Germany because so many railroad tracks had been blown up. Our car would be hooked on to a train for a while. Then they would unhook us and another train come along and pick us up. It was several days before they got us to the Swiss border.

I do not know how far we traveled in Germany to get to Switzerland because they would take us first one direction and then another. On this trip I saw some of the forced laborers, mostly Jewish, who were working along the railroad tracks in starved condition. Their arms and legs were hardly any larger than broomsticks. These people were political prisoners, but, even in their emaciated state, they were often in shackles and chains.

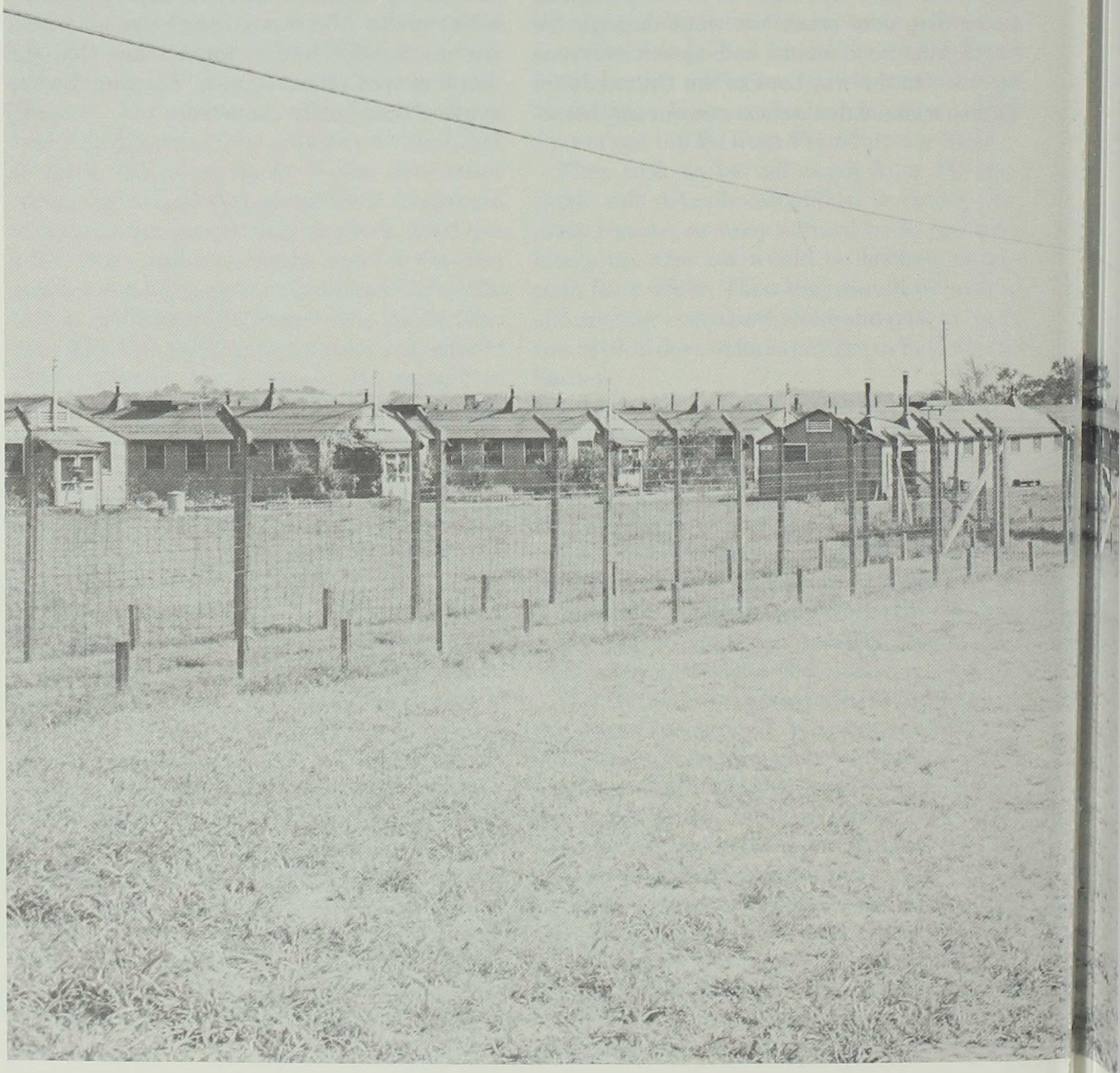
The Germans became quite cordial to us on this trip to Switzerland. We stopped, in fact, at one place where they gave us two Red Cross parcels as well as baths. I slept under sheets that night. It was the first time I had seen a sheet for two years. It was immediately prior to our arrival at the Swiss border.

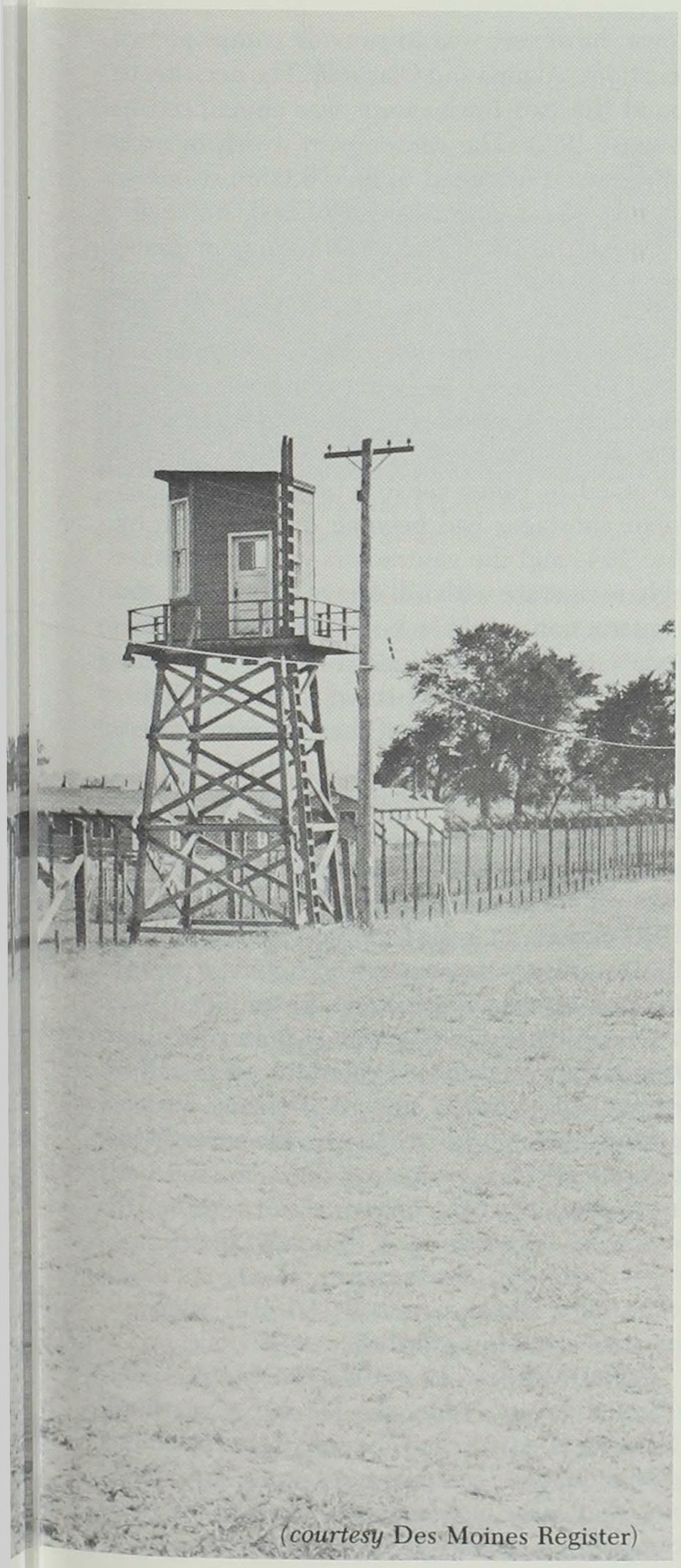
When we arrived in Switzerland, the Germans turned us over to Swiss soldiers and we proceeded by train across Switzerland. We went to Berne and then to the southern part of France. There the Swiss turned us over to American soldiers who took us to Marseilles.

From there we were brought by hospital ship back to the United States. During the journey we received deluxe treatment with full meals. We received steaks and ice cream as well as other delicacies which we had not heard of or seen for a long time. It took us quite a long time to come back but it was a pleasant trip as it was through the southern Atlantic with smooth sailing all the way. This trip was in sharp contrast to our trip over when we went through the North Atlantic in winter with almost everyone seasick. On the way back to the United States we also realized that we were on our way home.

We anchored in Charleston, South Carolina, and were kept there four days for interrogation and briefing as to what we could say and do when we reached our homes. At this time there were still many prisoners in camps in Germany and we were limited in what we could say. We were not allowed, for instance, to make any speeches or to talk to the press. I did not want to make speeches or talk with representatives of the media. All I wanted was to get home and see my family, letting them know that the words of my German captor, "For you, the war is over," had finally come true. □

Some Thoughts on Prisoners of War in Iowa, 1943 to 1946





(*courtesy* Des Moines Register)

Occasionally the editor of this journal in conversation or correspondence with members of the State Historical Society or other interested Iowans is reminded of areas of Iowa history which have been overlooked in recent years. Late last year, following a conversation with Ruth Watkins of Clarinda about Iowa during the Second World War, I found in this office a fifty-five page typescript of newspaper articles from the Clarinda Herald-Journal *about the prisoner of war camp which was located near Clarinda. The articles dealt with the camp and the impact which it had on the town and the area and had been collected three years ago by Betty Malvern Ankeny.*

After looking through the typescript, I realized that memories of the Second World War on the home front are memories of a time fast slipping into the distant past. It is often hard to realize that the war ended thirty-nine years ago this year. Or to put it another way, it is difficult to admit that we have an increasing number of high school and even college students whose parents cannot remember that war at all. But those people who do remember Iowa in the years between 1941 and 1945 talk most often, it seems to me, of rationing with its stamps and stickers and books, of shortages of such "essentials" as cigarettes and liquor, of a thirty-five mile per hour speed limit, of scrap drives and bond rallies and V-mail and a paucity of good baseball players in the major leagues. But in two towns in Iowa, Algona and Clarinda, there must be a number of people who can remember Iowa's only prisoner of war camps.

Since talking with Ruth Watkins and reading through the Clarinda newspaper accounts, I have talked with a few of my colleagues and read some more newspapers and I have come to the conclusion that some serious historical work should be done on Iowa's prisoner of war camps. And perhaps a small introduction to the subject from this desk might spur someone to do just that. I hope so.

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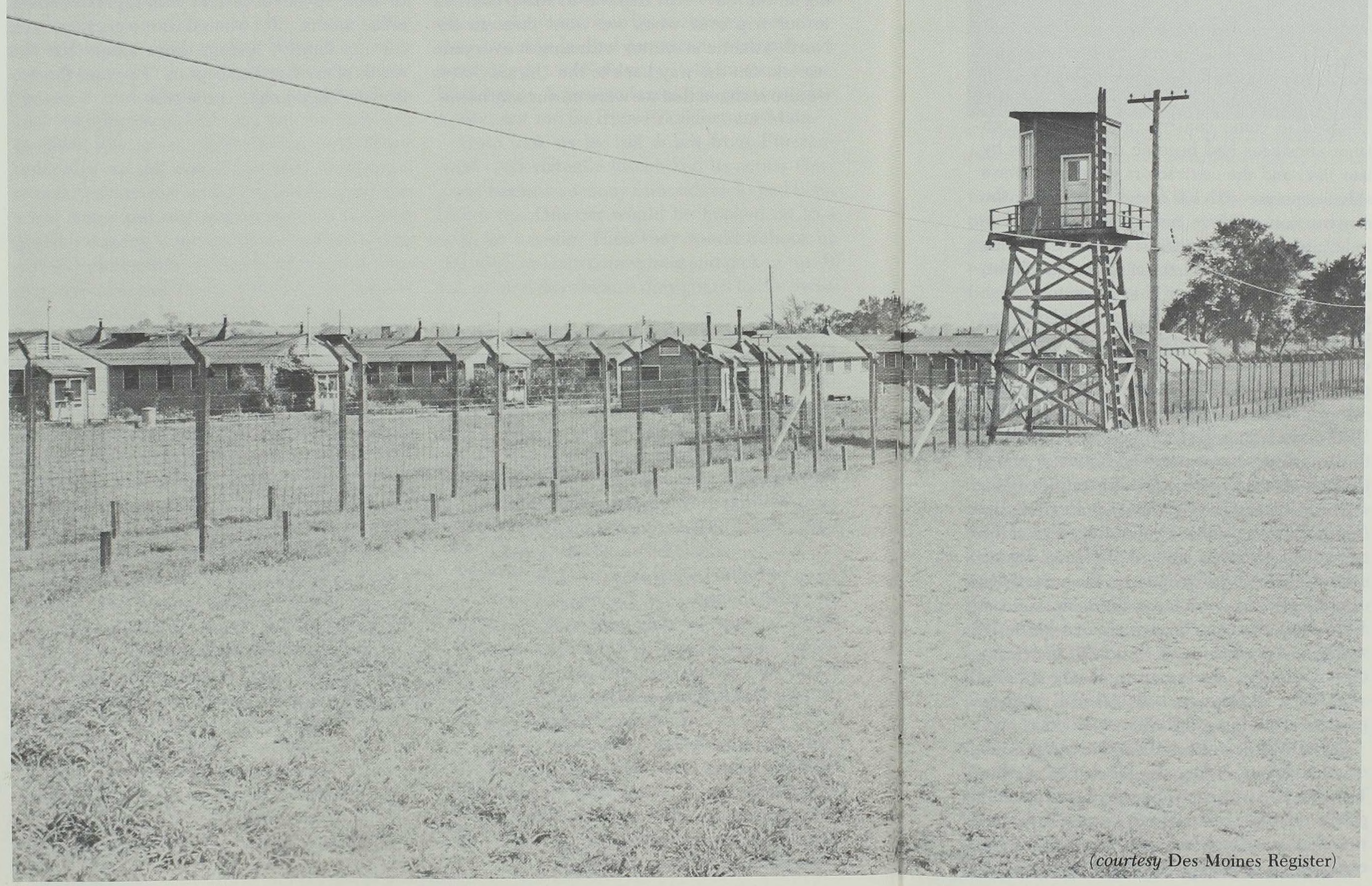

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In the first years of the Second World War, the United States was not faced with any serious problem concerning prisoners of war. In the course of a series of disastrous setbacks

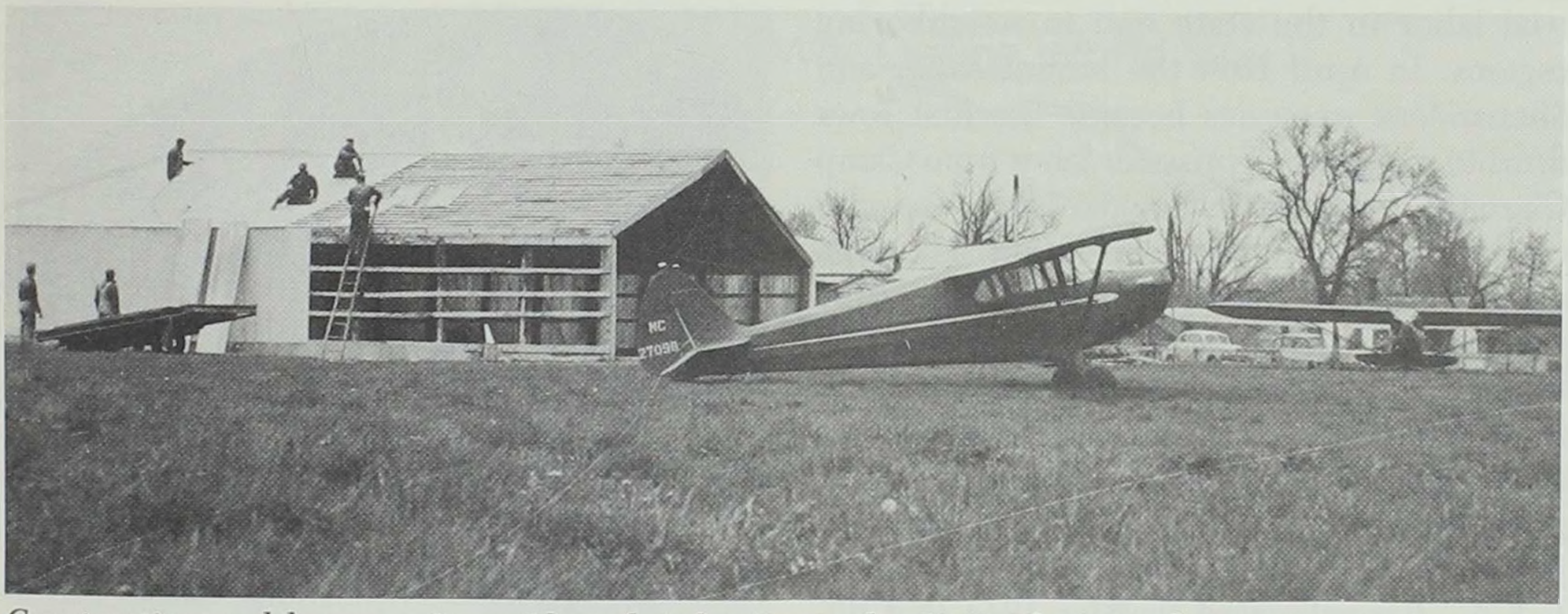
in the Pacific and during the longer period of military buildup in Britain and Ireland before beginning operations against the Axis powers in North Africa or Europe, the United States had simply not taken prisoners in any great number. The North African campaign changed all that. Thus, in 1942, the War Department found it was necessary to make decisions about moving prisoners to the United States and making provisions for them there. The decision to transfer prisoners to the United States was based in part upon the ease of transporting them in Liberty ships and other ships which would be returning in need of ballast after bringing their cargoes of men and matériel to the British Isles or elsewhere in the European war zone. In May 1943, following the defeat of Rommel's forces in North Africa, our prisoner hauls suddenly increased in size and soon the pipeline to the United States was delivering prisoners in great numbers. It has been estimated that there were less than 3,000 prisoners of war in the United States in March 1943 but that their number increased to over 53,000 by June of that year and to over 163,000 by September.

The biggest problem in this country was establishing camps to house the prisoners. Initially it was believed that they could be put in Civilian Conservation Corps camps which were no longer in use or in camps originally created for the internment of enemy aliens but the number of prisoners eventually forced the War Department to build new camps. The location of the camps was somewhat restricted as the army did not want prisoner of war camps in blacked-out coastal areas, in areas close to either the Canadian or Mexican borders, or in any area near shipyards or airplane factories. There were also serious questions raised about locating camps in or even near large urban areas. Consequently, camps tended to be located mainly in the South and Southwest.

Iowa, however, was to provide camps at two locations, Algona and Clarinda. The decision to build the two Iowa camps was announced in August 1943. The camps were twins of each other, each designed to hold 3,000 prisoners, with a guard complement of 500 and eight officers. They were to cost something in excess of $1,000,000 each.

The impact on the towns of Algona and Clarinda was immediate and largely beneficial. At the outset there was an increase in the local labor force by upwards of 700 men involved in camp construction, even though labor shortages had become quite serious by late 1943 and the contractors were not always able to operate with full crews. Moreover, the construction workers needed housing. Clarinda city officials quickly realized that they might have to expand the city's water, light, and power capabilities if they were to furnish such services to the camp. Even the post offices had to prepare for boom times ahead since they would be handling mail for both prisoners and guards. And finally there were those patriotic responsibilities to fulfill such as establishing USO centers in both Clarinda and Algona for the American servicemen who would be part of the new local scene. In early November 1943, with construction underway at both sites, the *Des Moines Register* indicated the effect of the rapid changes on the citizens of Algona. It suggested that their first reaction to the news that a camp would be built near them was one of astonishment, then concern about whether it would be a good thing, and, finally, the *Register* stated that the citizens of Algona had adopted a mostly neutral but still slightly positive attitude toward the whole affair.

By mid-December 1943 the new commander of Camp Clarinda, Lieut. Col. Arthur T. Lobdell, arrived on the scene and began a public relations campaign to assuage any worries that local people might have about the camp. On 9 January 1944, with the camp vir-



Construction work began on Camp Clarinda in late September 1943. The Seventh Army Service Command believed the camp would be activated by 15 December 1943. (courtesy Ruth Shambaugh Watkins)

tually completed, and before the arrival of any prisoners, Lieut. Col. Lobdell even set up guided tours of the facility for the public. Two weeks later, on 24 January 1944, the first contingent of prisoners arrived to prepare Camp Clarinda for the arrival of the main group of prisoners.

The treatment of German prisoners of war was governed by the terms of the Geneva convention which provided for "guarantees of hygiene and healthfulness," and conditions in terms of housing and food which would be comparable to those of "troops at base camps of the detaining power." Provision further had to be made for care of the sick, religious freedom, and the encouragement of "intellectual diversions and sports." Moreover, under the terms of the Geneva convention, only privates were required to work and that work was carefully limited to tasks not directly in support of the war effort of the detaining power.

The War Department had begun to work out the terms of such prisoner labor in 1943 before the Iowa camps were opened. It found that care had to be taken to insure that prisoner labor was never allowed to compete with American labor for jobs. In 1943, however, and later in 1944, labor shortages in certain areas made it possible to put prisoners to work outside the camps.

Prisoners certainly worked inside the camps from their arrival there. In the Iowa camps they functioned as cooks and bakers, as maintenance men, as cabinet makers, sign painters, and even, one Christmas, as toymakers for the children of their guards. Most importantly, however, they put in a very large victory garden at the camp near Clarinda. Initially it was planned to put much of the 120-acre garden into corn but the German prisoners had little appreciation for corn (or squash or sweet potatoes, for that matter) and seventy to eighty acres of the garden ended up in potatoes.

In addition to working in the Iowa camps, prisoners of war did a certain amount of volunteer work during the floods which threatened the Missouri Valley in spring and early summer of 1944. In April they were sandbagging on the dikes on the Iowa side of the river near Nebraska City, and in June German prisoners were credited with having saved 12,800 acres of land and the entire town of Percival by their later efforts on the river.

But eventually German prisoners of war in the Iowa camps became involved in easing the shortage of agricultural and indus-

trial labor in the state and in neighboring regions. In April 1944 the Mount Arbor and Shenandoah nurseries became the first Iowa firms to make use of prisoner labor from Camp Clarinda. Such labor, incidentally, was also covered by the Geneva convention. The prisoners were paid by the army while the army was paid the prevailing wage rate for labor by the contracting industries or farmers. Since the army then only paid the prisoners eighty cents a day, there was a sizable amount of money pocketed, as it were, by the government. Judith M. Gansberg, in her book *Stalag: U.S.A.*, has estimated that for 1944 that difference meant a profit on a national scale for the government of $100 million from prisoner of war labor.

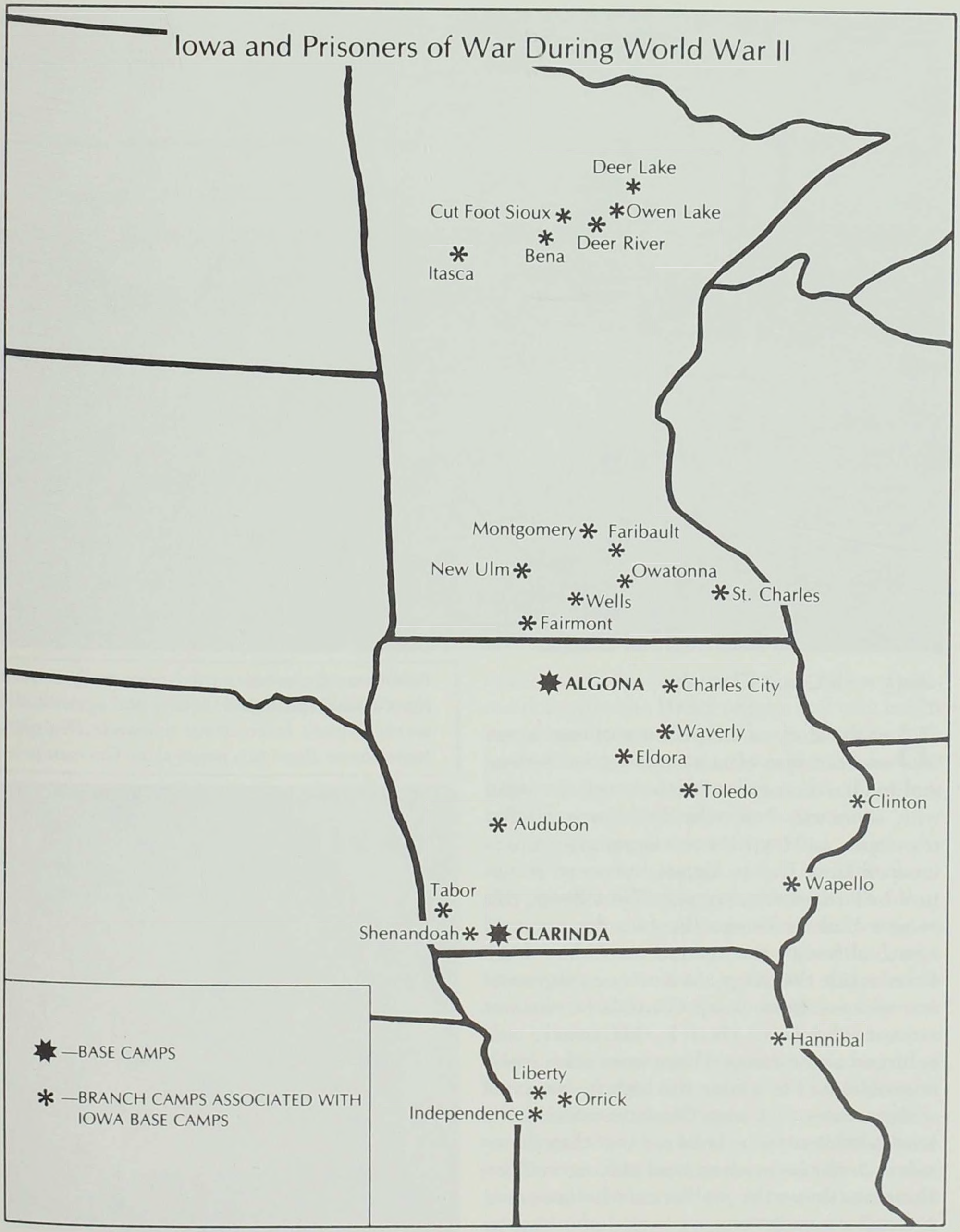
Shortages of agricultural labor in May 1944 brought prisoners from Camp Clarinda into the asparagus harvest in Fremont County. In late May 1944 a series of storms devastated several Iowa counties and prisoners were quickly put to work rebuilding fences, reconstructing barns, and repairing farm equipment. Later in August 1944, War Hemp, Inc., began to use Algona prisoners in its hemp processing plants, as did the Reinbeck Canning Company for its sweet corn pack.

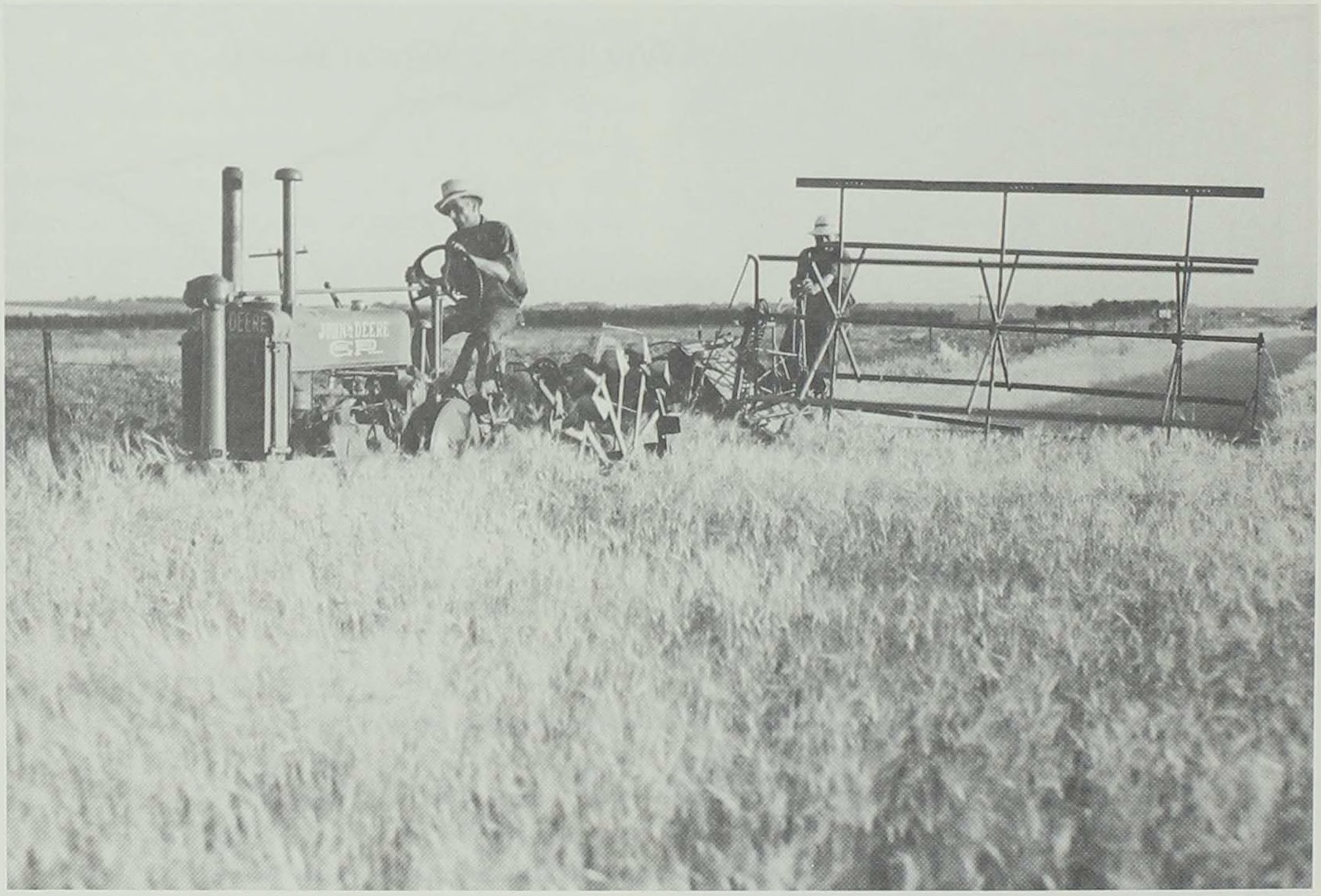
Finally a broad network of branch camps had to be built and staffed. Some of Camp Clarinda's branch camps included camps at Hannibal, Missouri, where prisoners were set to work sorting shoes, at Liberty, Missouri, where they worked in an alfalfa dehydration operation, at Wadsworth, Kansas, where they became involved in the construction of a veterans' hospital, and in Wapello and Audubon. Camp Algona maintained side camps at Eldora and Waverly while other prisoners from Algona worked for Pillsbury Mills, Inc., at Clinton. Camp Algona even had another eleven side lumber camps in Minnesota. Overall, at least twenty-two branch camps were associated with Camp Algona during the course of the war, as were at least ten branch

Lieut. Col. Arthur T. Lobdell, Army Engineers Corps, was named commanding officer of Camp Clarinda in early December 1943. He worked closely with members of the community to calm any fears created by the proximity of prisoners of war. In June 1944 Lobdell was transferred to Algona to assume command of the prisoner of war camp there. (courtesy Ruth Shambaugh Watkins)

Opposite: While incomplete information prevents the pinpointing of all the branch camps associated with Camps Algona and Clarinda between 1944 and 1946, the map is illustrative of the breadth of the branch camp network and the places where prisoner of war labor was used to help ease the wartime shortage of labor.

Iowa and Prisoners of War During World War II



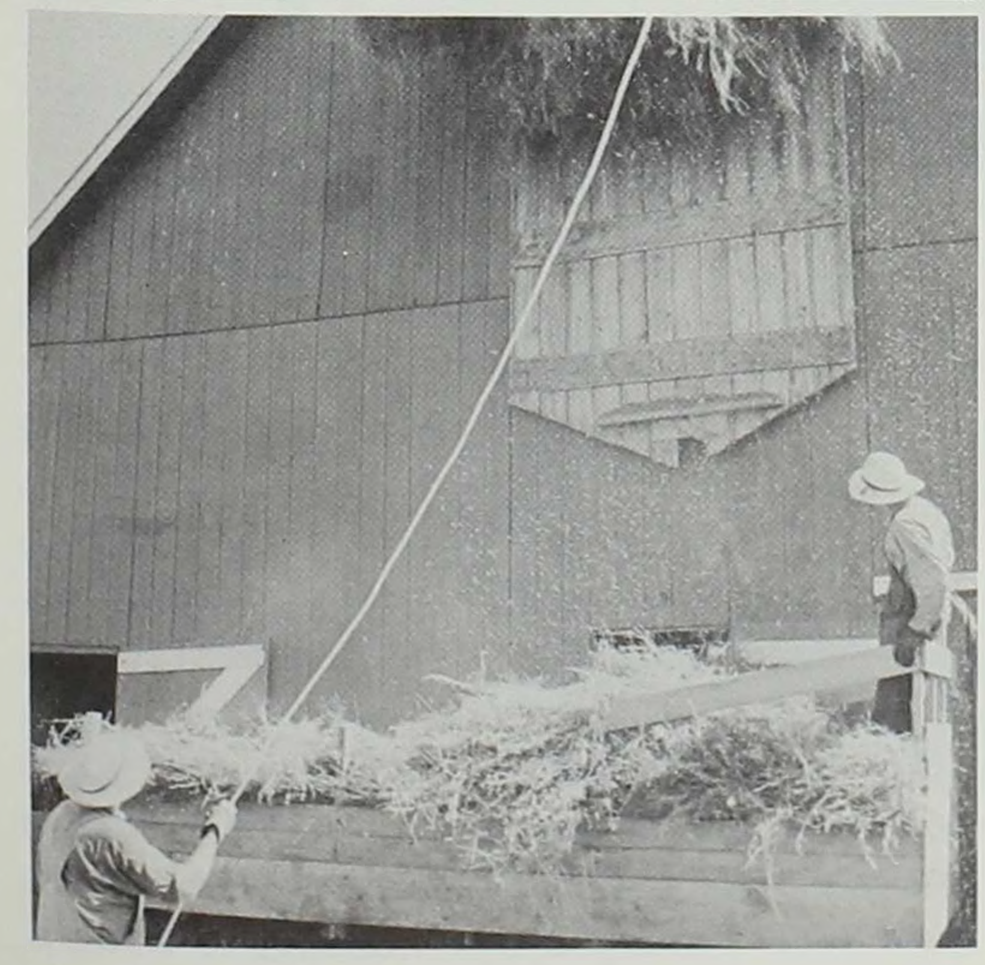


Prisoners of war were used extensively to ease the wartime shortage of labor, and agricultural workers were in constant demand. The photographs on these two pages show German pris-

camps with Camp Clarinda.

But the story of the prisoner of war camps was not one of continuous good feeling and amelioration and volunteer work. To begin with, there was always the threat or possibility of escapes. In May 1944 two German prisoners escaped from Camp Algona but were recaptured shortly thereafter near West Bend. (No sooner back in camp, the two disappeared again, although the second time they were found inside the camp.) At least one prisoner of war escaped from Camp Clarinda but he was recaptured near Orrick, Missouri, and returned to the camp. There were other kinds of problems. For a time the high incidence of malaria cases at Camp Clarinda worried the local inhabitants who believed that they themselves might be in some kind of danger. Then there was always the problem of whether or not internal camp governance was dominated by

oners of war at work on a haying crew near Clarinda, c. 1944-1945. (courtesy Ruth Shambaugh Watkins)



hard-line Nazis who were seeking to keep prisoners loyal to the Hitler regime and who might try to maintain such loyalties by tactics which could lead to murder or suicide. There was little surface indication that this problem existed to any degree in the Iowa camps.

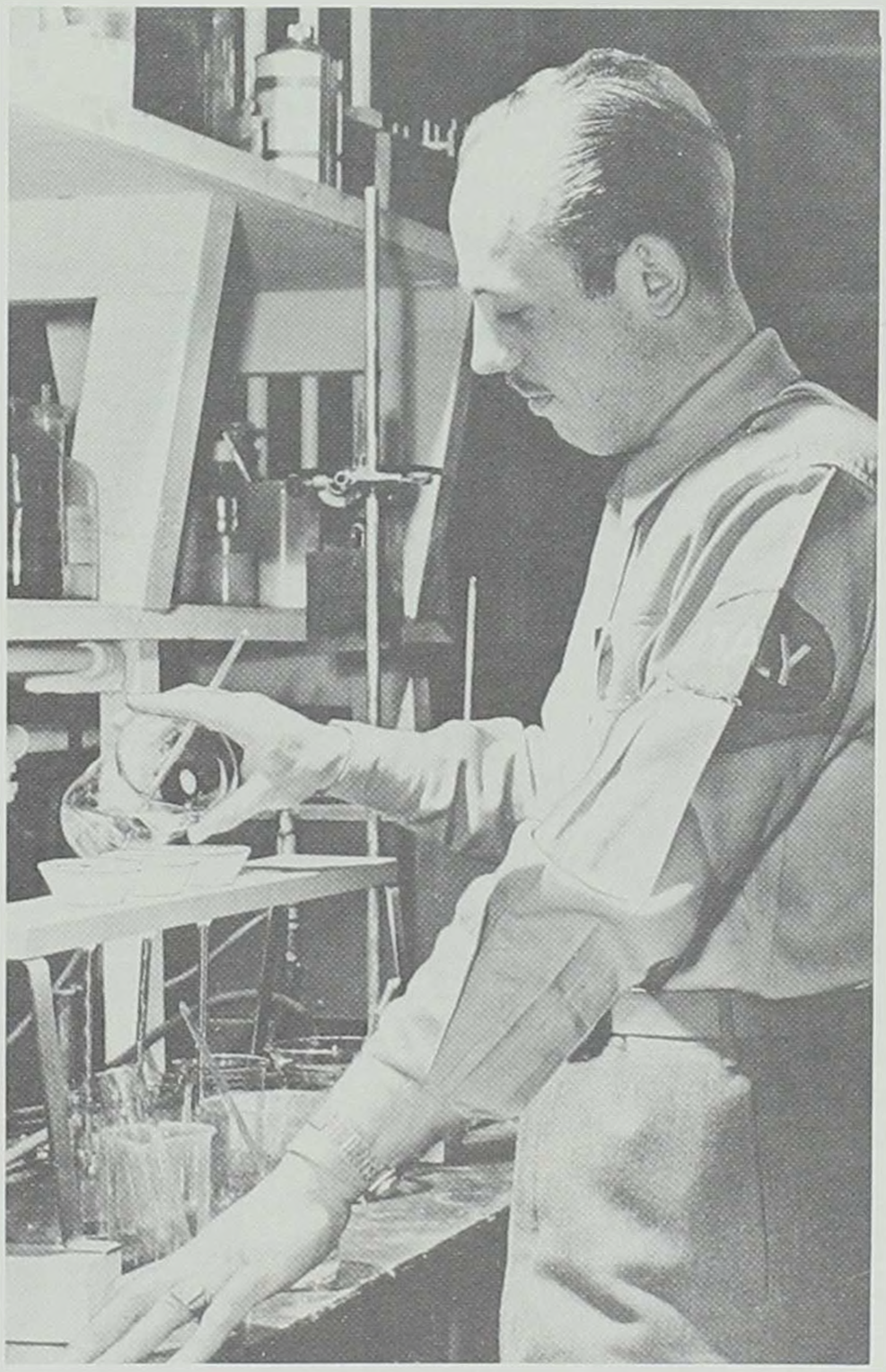
Far more serious was a question which was raised by many citizens of this country about the possible 'coddling' of prisoners. The War Department made serious efforts to live up to the letter of the Geneva convention and, as a consequence, German prisoners did receive treatment similar to that given base soldiers in the United States Army. Difficulties arose when it became apparent that, in the world of the home front, that world of shortages and going without, there were many citizens who were not living on a level equal to our own base soldiers or the captured prisoners. German prisoners themselves were oftentimes astonished at the treatment they received in

the camps. It has been suggested by some that some German prisoners never lived so well in their entire military career as they did in captivity in this country. They had mail privileges, they could have visits from relatives in the United States, they could pursue their education, and their food was at times so good that American personnel preferred to eat the food prepared by the German cooks in the prisoner of war mess halls.

As the war progressed, the degree of our enmity increased with the atrocities of the Battle of the Bulge and the indications of the manner in which our own prisoners were being treated in Germany and elsewhere, and there began a series of outcries against 'coddling'.

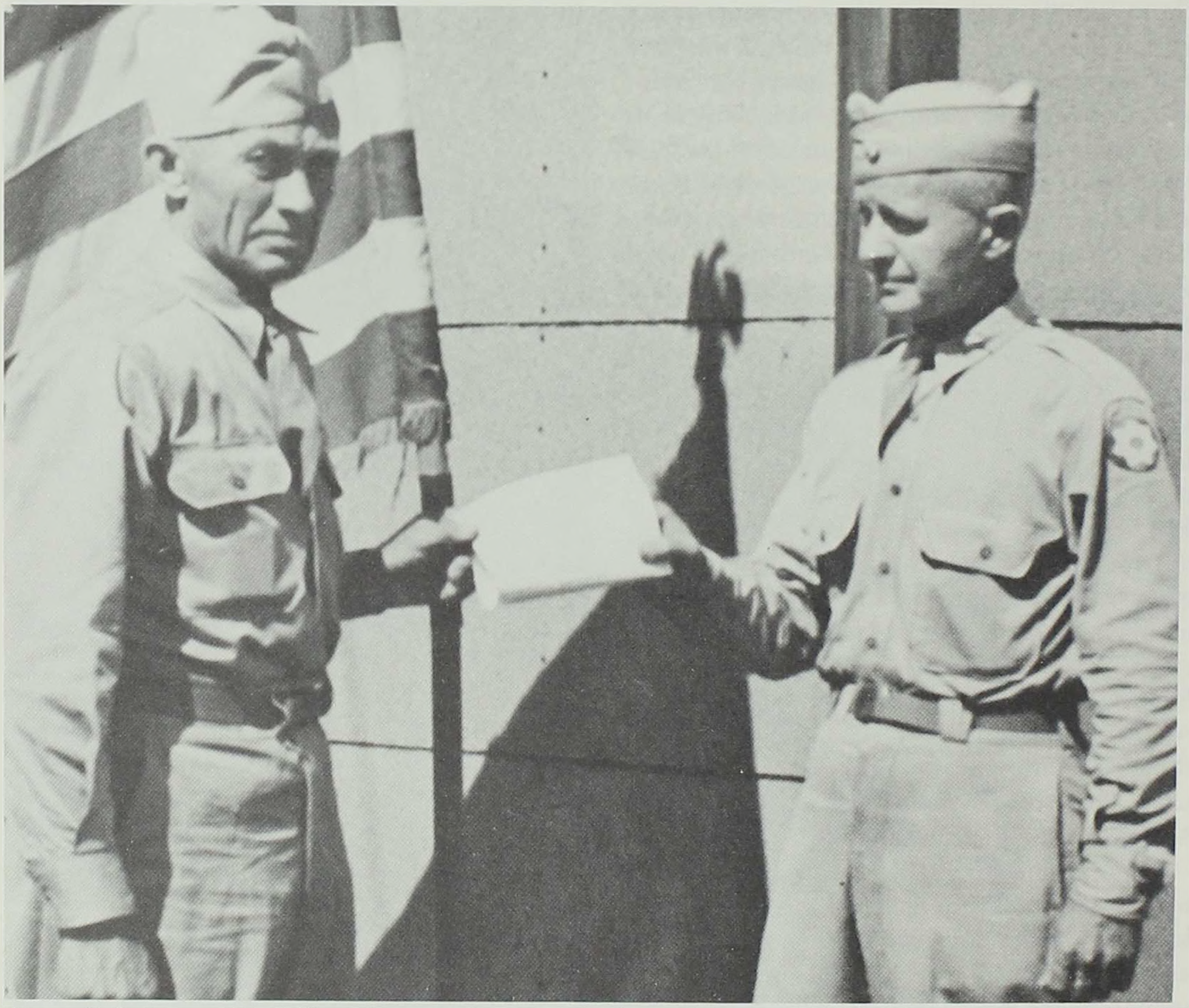
Several hundred Italians worked in two service units at the Rock Island Arsenal between 1944 and 1945. Primarily, they were assigned to heavy work, such as moving boxes and crates, salvage work, or general cleanup. (courtesy Des Moines Register)

There were rumors that dances were being held at one camp in Pennsylvania. It was true that the prisoners at Camp Algona had managed to buy a used grand piano with $750 taken from their canteen profits. Finally, in August 1944, Representative Andrew May of Kentucky announced an investigation of camps in Pennsylvania and Kentucky after having heard of prisoners being taken to movies and other places out of the camps. By February 1945 a variety of congressmen were warming to the task of castigating anyone who might be responsible for "pampering prisoners of war." In one speech Representative Sikes of Florida talked about "frequent accounts of the good food, cigarettes, and candies enjoyed by German prisoners. Elaborate menus are printed, many of them showing meat point requirements higher than those available to American citizens." Representative Sikes yielded the floor to Representative Charles B. Hoeven of Alton, Iowa, who added: "I am glad the gentleman has brought this matter to the attention of the country. I know of a prison camp in the Midwest which is supplied with every luxury — innerspring beds, the newest type of Frigidaire, and the finest food. At the same time I know of a hospital which has been trying to get a priority on a new Frigidaire and has been unable to get it."



A few members of the Italian service units had specialized skills valuable to the work of the arsenal. Lieut. Lucianno Carpi, an industrial chemist, helped ease the shortage of civilian chemists by working in the arsenal laboratory. (courtesy Des Moines Register)

In an aside, it might be pointed out that particular animosity was at times visited on the Italian prisoners of war whose status in this country had been horribly complicated by the fact that Italy had joined us in the war as a cobelligerent. The United States government could not send the Italians back to Italy but some attempt had to be made to place them in a different category than the German prisoners of war in this country. The result was to check out Italian prisoners (or former prisoners) very carefully and then to form large numbers of them into special service units which were allowed to function with a greater degree of freedom and often without guards. Additionally, they were allowd to work in jobs more directly related to the war effort. Thus some 400 of them were assigned to the Rock Island Arsenal. During the first half of 1945 this group came increasingly under fire from such groups as the Marine Dads club of Rock Island. There were charges that the Italians had bothered local girls while being marched to church, that they had engaged in drinking parties with girls, that they were getting popular brands of cigarettes in quantity when such were not available



Lieut. Col. George W. Ball, right, served as commandant of Camp Clarinda after Lieut. Col. Lobdell's transfer to Camp Algona, and throughout the period of Camp Clarinda's service as one of the few Japanese prisoner of war camps in the United States. (courtesy Ruth Shambaugh Watkins)

to the civilian population, and there was even a charge that they had caused an ice cream shortage in Rock Island.

Sensitive to all charges of 'coddling', officers in charge of the various camps did tend to reduce cigarette rations for prisoners, to substitute oleomargarine for butter in their rations, and generally to attempt to assuage the anger of the civilian population without breaking the spirit of the Geneva convention. They were intent upon not endangering our own prisoners abroad.

With one group of prisoners, however, there was never any hint of 'coddling'. On 1 February 1945 there was an announcement that Camp Clarinda would shortly begin a process of replacing its German prisoners with Japanese prisoners. It was to be one of two camps in the United States taking Japanese prisoners at the time; the other was Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Within a few days of the announcement, a letter to the editor of the *Des Moines Register* was printed which included a suggestion that perhaps former American pris-

The Oscar Youngmark home before the Clarinda prisoner of war camp was constructed. (courtesy Ruth Shambaugh Watkins)

Ruth Shambaugh Watkins, a cub reporter for the Clarinda Herald-Journal *during the summer of 1944, recently reinterviewed Mrs. Oscar Youngmark regarding her memories of the building of Camp Clarinda.*

Time has done little to ease the sense of disappointment and loss that Mrs. Youngmark still feels about the necessity of giving up the family farm to make way for Clarinda's prisoner of war camp: "I tried to rationalize and not feel bitter, because, after all, we were only giving up our farm while so many others were losing sons or daughters to the war effort. But that home place had been in the family for fifty years! My grandpa built it in 1890 and I was born just a mile away, on some of the other land that was also condemned [for the camp]."

The 70-acre Youngmark farm was only one of several farms condemned by the government during the summer of 1943 to make up the 293-acre camp area. It was prime Nodaway River Valley bottomland — level, excellent, and flat farm land. It was also just the kind of land the government needed for the camp site: "I happened to look out the window and saw some fellow surveying — out there on the road in front of our place. Then one Sunday morning, not too much later, they'd cut down about four rows of corn from our field . . . without saying anything to anybody — and they were out there surveying in the corn field! Oscar went out to talk to the surveyors, but they didn't tell [him] anything. Oscar always said 'if you want to find out anything you have to go uptown,' and that's where he finally learned what was going on — some fellows up there thought they knew, or at least this rumor was going around about a POW camp going to be built."

A considerable resettlement process was involved for the Youngmarks after their farm was condemned: "they held an auction and we bought back quite a few of the buildings, including the house, but everything had to be torn down before we could have it again. . . . [W]e had to live in town for two years before we could find another farm to buy. . . . [A]fter everything was all torn down and we'd moved to town, a U.S. Marshal appeared at our door to serve the [condemnation] papers. I always did think that was the oddest thing. Putting the cart before the horse! He came to tell us we had to move — after all that!"

oners freed by MacArthur would make good guards at Clarinda. Whatever neutrality or attempt at fair play had been the hallmark of the German phase of life at Camp Clarinda, such was not to be a feature of the Japanese phase. Both civilians and the military seemed to have had too vivid a memory of what had gone on in the Pacific since that fateful day in December 1941. Lieut. Col. George W. Ball, Lieut. Col. Lobdell's successor as commandant at Clarinda, made that abundantly clear. An article in the *Des Moines Register* on 8 April 1945 described Lieut. Col. Ball as openly despising the Japanese prisoners. It was pointed out in the article that that hatred was shared not only by the officers and enlisted men at Camp Clarinda but also by the remainder of the German contingent at the camp. Lieut. Col. Ball's description of the life of the Japanese prisoners at Clarinda made it very clear that attitudes were vastly different than they had been prior to the arrival of the Japanese. Summing it all up in his own terms, he said: "The German was far more desirable. They looked you in the eye. The Jap doesn't."

Finally the war ended. But for prisoners of war in this country, it did not end in either the month of May or the month of August in 1945. Delays followed upon delays as harvest needs and other labor demands came into play to set back final repatriation. It was not until early October 1945 that the Japanese prisoners of war were shipped out of Clarinda by rail, bound for agricultural work in the San Joaquin, California, area. The War Department suggested that they would be returned to Japan at the end of the harvesting season. Their departure left only 500 German prisoners in the Clarinda camp, and by mid-October they, too, had been shipped to other areas in need of agricultural labor. The Clarinda prisoner of war camp was ordered closed at midnight, 1 December 1945. In mid-January 1946 the 293-acre Clarinda camp was declared surplus and "designated for disposal as an airport" by the Surplus Property Administration. The Algona camp was even slower to close. The majority of its German prisoners were transferred to Fort Crook, Nebraska, in January and early February 1946. It was not until midnight of 15 February 1946, however, that the Algona camp closed, and Iowa's prisoner of war camps experience came to an end. □

Note on Sources

Several good sources were available for the preparation of this article. The *Des Moines Register* for the period from 1943 to 1946 was excellent in its coverage of Iowa's prisoner of war camps. Betty Malvern Ankeny's compilation of *Clarinda Herald-Journal* articles relating to the Clarinda prisoner of war camp was also valuable. Ruth Shambaugh Watkins provided invaluable assistance in terms of interviewing Clarinda residents directly affected by the camp — as in the case of Mrs. Oscar Youngmark, whose farm land and home was condemned to make way for the prisoner of war camp — and providing the editor with photographs to accompany the article. Judith M. Gansberg's *Stalag: U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977) and Byron Fairchild and Jonathan Grossman's *The Army and Industrial Manpower* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1959) were consulted, as were the *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, the *New York Times*, and the *Congressional Record* for early 1945. The editor should like to thank Dr. Raymond A. Smith, Jr., for the time, patience, and assistance he gave to this project.

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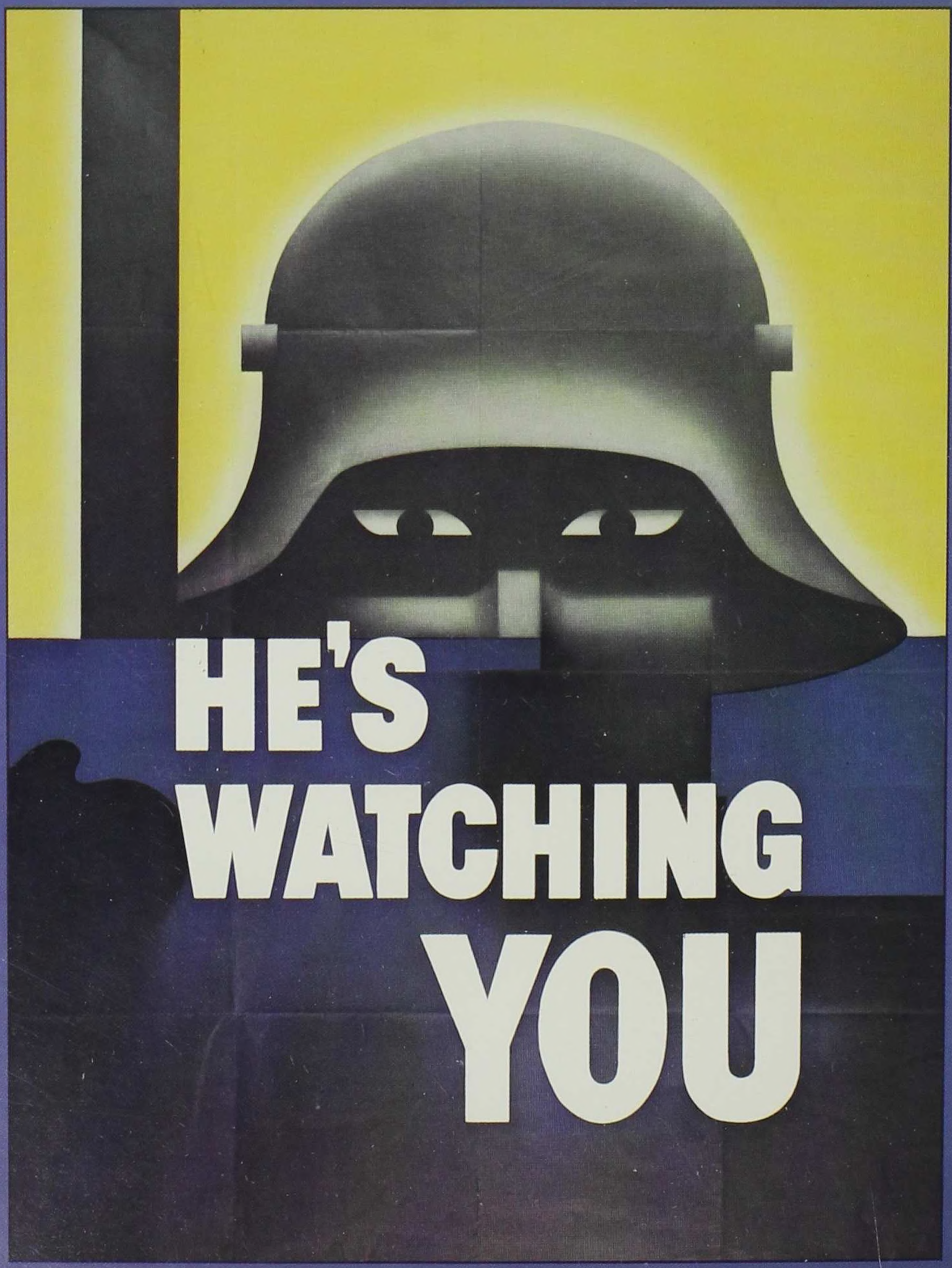

THE PALIMPSEST *is published bimonthly by the State Historical Society in Iowa City. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa. Postmaster: send address changes to State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.*

USISSN 0031-0360